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MAKING THE WEST END  
MODERN: SPACE, ARCHITECTURE  
AND SHOPPING IN 1930S LONDON

PhD Thesis

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# ABSTRACT

This research explores the shopping cultures of the 1930s West End, arguing for the recognition of this as a significant moment within consumption history, hitherto overlooked in favour of the Victorian and Edwardian periods. The approach is interdisciplinary, combining in a new way studies of shopping routes and networks, retail architecture, spectacle, consumer types and consumption practices.

The study first establishes the importance of shopping geographies in understanding the character of the 1930s West End. It positions this shopping hub within local, national and international networks. It also examines the gender and class-differentiated shopping routes within the West End, looking at how the rise of new consumer cultures during the period reconfigured this geography.

In the second section, a case study of two new Modern shops, Simpson Piccadilly and Peter Jones, provides the focus for a discussion of retail buildings. Architecture is presented as an important way in which the West End was transformed and modernity articulated. Modernism was a significant arrival in the West End's retail sector: it provided a new architectural approach with a close, if often problematic, relationship with shopping. The study thus reassesses common assumptions about the fundamental irreconcilability of modernism with consumption, femininity and spectacle.

The third section makes a more detailed examination of the staging of shopping cultures within the West End street, looking at window display, the application of light and decoration to facades, and participation in pageantry. The study thus revisits retail spectacle, an important strand within histories of shopping and of the urban, looking at how established strategies were adapted and developed to stage modernity, emerging consumer cultures and the West End itself during the 1930s.

The final section considers the consumer identities that were reflected by, and constructed through, the shopping geographies, architecture and spectacle of the 1930s West End. It

identifies two particular types - the Simpsons man and the *Vogue* reader - who embodied the new shopping cultures and practices. It positions them within a genealogy of consumer types, re-evaluating the convention of addressing the subject of shopping through such figures.

Ultimately, this research makes the case that an important kind of inter-war modernity is evidenced by these fashionable metropolitan shopping cultures, which must be allowed to sit alongside received understandings of 1930s Britain and the history of modernity.



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# 1.

## ‘A NEW LONDON’

[Figure 1.1] In 1936, *Vogue*’s photographers captured a moment in a West End shopping street. On the sheltered pavement in front of a striking new Oxford Street shoe shop, a woman dressed smartly and fashionably in tailor-made, hat and furs, a child by her side, turned to face the camera as if surprised whilst engaging with this monument to consumption. Further along the street, a young man, sporting a modern lounge suit and hat, was caught in a similar pose. Around them, the life of the streets continued: purposeful feet pounded the pavements and shoppers carefully examined the contents of the display windows. These two figures, the street they inhabited, the building and displays that engaged them, encapsulated the self-consciously modern consumption cultures of the 1930s West End.

This photograph appeared in the first of a pair of highly significant *Vogue* articles, ‘A New London’<sup>1</sup> and ‘Shopping - Then and Now’<sup>2</sup> of 1936 and 1937 respectively. Together, they conveyed both the cultural importance and the distinctive modernity of the West End’s shopping district at this moment. They revealed a belief that shopping cultures defined a city, and were furthermore an index to the modernity of society. ‘Shopping – Then and Now’ compared fashionable West End shopping practices of 1937 with those of 1916, concluding that ‘In twenty-one years the whole essence of shops and shopping has

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<sup>1</sup> ‘A New London’, *Vogue*, 5 August 1936, 8-13.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Shopping – Then and Now’, *Vogue*, 1 September 1937, 72-3, 92, 108.



changed'.<sup>3</sup> According to the article, London's consumption cultures had been transformed by more frequent fashion changes and the quicker transactions enabled by the new acceptability of ready-to-wear amongst the middle classes. Also singled out was the conduct of shopping as part of a frequent 'day in town', and the associated treatment of shopping as a leisure activity, an urban pleasure, and an integral part of metropolitan fashion cultures. The slow, exclusive formality of shopping in the post-Edwardian West End had been replaced by the fleeting, fashionable, self-consciously modern cultures of the 1930s, 'today the big shops are ever a triumph for tomorrow.'<sup>4</sup> In 'A New London', the pleasures of the latest display practices were identified as important markers of this modernity, 'the possibilities of silent unhurried shopping in the labyrinth of show cases at the entrance of the new Dolcis and Lilley and Skinner dawn on you with joy.'<sup>5</sup> But above all, the striking Modern<sup>6</sup> designs of the new West End stores were shown to have transformed the street scene and the shopping environment, 'shopping is ... made enticing for all, in this new London'.<sup>7</sup>

This was indeed an important moment in the history of shopping in London, which marked the arrival of new consumer identities. Not only were *Vogue's* women confidently navigating their way through the West End's streets, but fashionable young men in sharply-cut suits were to be found within the main shopping thoroughfares. The two *Vogue* articles coincided with the opening of the men's department store, Simpson Piccadilly<sup>8</sup> in 1936, 'nine floors of store exclusively for men, where they can revel in all the delights of shopping'.<sup>9</sup> It was both a retailing revolution, and a Modernist urban landmark. This important event weaves its way through the thesis. Simpsons was instrumental in reconfiguring the area's shopping routes and exemplified a new kind of retail architecture. It had 'spectacle' built into its fabric in a particularly sophisticated way, and housed a new kind of West End consumer. During the 1930s, West End shopping would remain special and luxurious, but its texture changed as the complex relationship between gender, class, modernity and shopping shifted within this place. Simpsons therefore provides a central thread for a broader contextual study of shopping in the West End, which considers the

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 73.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 108.

<sup>5</sup> 'A New London', *Vogue*, 5 August 1936, 9.

<sup>6</sup> Throughout the thesis, 'Modern', 'Modernism' and 'Modernist' are used in their capitalised form to denote the architectural style or movement. The same convention is not imposed on quoted materials.

<sup>7</sup> 'A New London', *Vogue*, 5 August 1936, 13.

<sup>8</sup> Simpson Piccadilly is henceforth usually referred to as 'Simpsons', following the store's own convention, although the variations 'Simpson' and 'Simpson's' were also used in the media.

<sup>9</sup> *Daily Mail*, 30 April 1936.



wider community of shops and shoppers which together made up the fabric and cultures of the West End streets.

## NARRATIVES OF THE 1930S

This thesis argues for the usefulness of shopping cultures as a means of understanding inter-war society. Its examination of the vibrant fashionable consumption practices of the West End contributes to the reassessment of narratives of 1930s Britain which have prioritised accounts of economic depression.<sup>10</sup> Economic and social historians have now recognised that Britain's experience of depression was indeed less severe and briefer than that endured in Europe and North America.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, they have noted that within Britain there was significant variation in levels of prosperity according to region, class and sectors of the economy.<sup>12</sup> Through a study of West End shopping, this thesis adds to a body of work revealing a flourishing and broad middle class, a group which lavished its prosperity on leisure and consumption, and was concentrated numerically and culturally in London and the South East. The use of consumption as a useful index to society has an established historiography: for example, the new cultures surrounding the nineteenth-century department store have frequently been used as a tool for discussing social change. Consumption has specifically been shown to be an important factor in London's history.<sup>13</sup> This study builds on this work, showing how within 1930s culture, West End consumption constituted a pivot for discourses on gender, class, place, modernity and the urban.

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<sup>10</sup> Indeed, this received view of 1930s decline is part of a story of a slow British political, economic and cultural decline from the later nineteenth century onwards, which is linked to a belief in the dominance of 'anti-modern' tendencies within British cultures. This literature, which Wiener's work has been central, is outlined by Dauntton and Rieger. Martin Dauntton, and Bernhard Rieger, *Meanings of Modernity: Britain from the Late-Victorian Era to World War II*, Berg: Oxford, 2001, 1-2; Martin J. Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit, 1850 – 1980*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

<sup>11</sup> Sean Glynn and Alan Booth, *Modern Britain: A Social and Economic History*, London and New York: Routledge, 1996.

<sup>12</sup> For example, Jackson describes this 'prosperous and expanding' middle class group, 'By the end of the thirties, almost a third of those with incomes of £400 and over were living in and immediately around the capital.' Alan A. Jackson *The Middle Classes 1900 – 1950*, Nairn: David St John Thomas, 1991, 16. Stevenson and Cooke similarly point to a divided experience of economic recovery. John Stevenson and Chris Cook, *The Slump: Society and Politics During the Depression*, London: Cape, 1977.

<sup>13</sup> Studies by Ackroyd, Porter and White have acknowledged the role of consumption in their histories of London, whilst more specialised studies of London's shopping history have also been conducted by Breward, Nead and Rappaport. Peter Ackroyd, *London: The Biography*, London: Chatto and Windus, 2000; Roy Porter, *London: A Social History*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1994; White Jerry, *London in the Twentieth Century: a City and its People*, London: Viking 2001; Christopher Breward, *The Hidden Consumer: Masculinities, Fashion and City Life, 1860 - 1914*, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1999; Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000; Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*.



Central to the argument is a reassessment of the role of the West End within inter-war British consumption cultures. The few existing accounts have tended to locate inter-war consumer culture within the suburban-based lower-middle classes.<sup>14</sup> These useful studies have linked this genre of consumption culture to the development of cheap commodities, including ready-to-wear, and the associated rise of national brands and multiple stores, and to the decline of the big London department store.<sup>15</sup> Humble has suggested that, in response to the perception of consumer culture as a lower-middle-class phenomenon, the established middle class withdrew from public engagement with consumption and developed instead a culture of ‘thrift’.<sup>16</sup> This thesis firmly refutes the dominance of such a culture, showing that alongside the undoubted expansion of lower-middle-class consumption described by Alexander et al., the luxury end of the market concentrated in the West End enjoyed continued popularity and potency as a symbol of bourgeois consumption. This was evidenced in the construction of shopping geographies, the location of prestige building projects, a concentration of spectacular practices and the prominence of West End consumer identities within British narratives of shopping. This study therefore argues for a consistent engagement with consumer culture right across the middle class. However, it does not argue for an overly democratised and homogenised assessment of inter-war shopping practices and fashionability. Rather, it describes how subtle distinctions were made between the different groups invested in this new consumer society; the conceptualisation of the West End enabling the place to retain associations of luxury and specialness.

An important contribution of this research is to consider masculine and feminine consumption simultaneously and relatedly. Work on both historical and contemporary consumption cultures has already highlighted issues of gender difference, but has tended to focus either on feminine or on masculine consumption. Men’s shopping remains a comparatively unexplored area, contrasting with the plethora of studies of feminine consumption, something that this study seeks to redress.<sup>17</sup> This thesis does not diminish the

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<sup>14</sup> See for example, Sally Alexander, ‘Becoming a Woman in London in the 1920s and 30s’, *Becoming a Woman and Other Essays in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Feminist History*, London: Virago, 1994; Janice Winship, ‘Culture of Restraint: The British Chain Store 1920 – 1939’ in Jackson et al. *Commercial Cultures: Economies, Practices, Spaces*, Oxford and New York: Berg, 2000.

<sup>15</sup> Even Calladine positions his discussion of the new Peter Jones store of the 1930s against a background of department store decline and chain store success. Tony Calladine, ‘“A Paragon of Lucidity and Taste”: the Peter Jones Department Store’, *Transactions of the Ancient Monuments Society*, vol. 45, 2001, 26.

<sup>16</sup> Nicola Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel, 1920s to 1950s: Class, Domesticity and Bohemianism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, 88.

<sup>17</sup> Existing work on masculine consumption has included Breward *The Hidden Consumer*; Laura Ugolini, ‘Ready-to-wear or Made-to measure?’, *Textile History*, 34 (2), 2003, 192-213; Laura Ugolini, ‘Clothes and the Modern Man in 1930s



significance of gender distinctions within shopping practices, but recognises that they were constructed in relation to each other. It argues that a distinctive characteristic of 1930s shopping cultures was the contentious disruption of existing gender-differentiated shopping practices, geographies and identities, illuminated by the positioning of the central case study of Simpsons within the context of coexistent feminine cultures in the West End's main thoroughfares.

## MOMENTS OF BRITISH MODERNITY

Another key investigation is the relatively unexplored nature of mid-twentieth-century modernity, and the role of shopping cultures within it. This study is concerned with how modernity was articulated through shifting narratives of the modern city and of fashionable metropolitan consumption, through Modernist retail architecture and new consumer identities. It is therefore necessary to place the thesis alongside the mass of existing studies of modernity, which have been preoccupied with citing various periods, places and activities as modern.<sup>18</sup>

Modernity has been differently inflected by the diverse authors within this body of work. At its most fundamental, modernity has been used to describe a society with a noticeable self-consciousness about the distinctively 'modern' nature of its 'present', expressed through a 'language of modernity'. Baudelaire's definition highlighted its fleeting and fragile nature, identifying it as 'the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable.'<sup>19</sup> Berman's seminal study built on this definition, stressing the experience of disintegration associated with a rupture with the past. For him, modernity was characterised by 'a unity of disunity: it pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish. To be Modern is to be part of a universe in which, as Marx said,

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Oxford', *Fashion Theory*, Vol.4, 2000, 427-446; Frank Mort and Peter Thompson, 'Retailing, Community Culture and Masculinity in 1950s Britain: The Case of Montague Burton, Tailor of Taste', *History Workshop Journal*, 38, 1994, 106-27; Frank Mort, *Cultures of Consumption: Masculinities and Social Space in late Twentieth-Century Britain*, London: Routledge, 1996.

<sup>18</sup> Useful surveys of the field are contained in the introduction to Becky Conekin, Frank Mort and Chris Waters, *Moments of Modernity: Reconstructing Britain 1945 - 1964*, London: Rivers Oram, 1999; Daunt and Rieger's introduction in Daunt and Rieger, *Meanings of Modernity*; David Gilbert, David Matless and Brian Short, 'Historical Geographies of British Modernity' in David Gilbert, David Matless and Brian Short (eds.), *Geographies of British Modernity*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2003; Mica Nava and Alan O'Shea (eds), *Modern Times: Reflections on a Century of English Modernity*, London: Routledge, 1996; Nead, *Victorian Babylon*, introduction.

<sup>19</sup> Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life 1859-60*, cited in Wolff, Janet, *Feminine Sentences: Essays on Women and Culture*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990, 35.



“all that is solid melts into air”.<sup>20</sup> Others, including de Certeau, have emphasised a necessary, dynamic relationship with its other: the past.<sup>21</sup> Many have moved away from reading modernity as a set of experiences, casting it rather as a ‘mindset’, ‘psychic formation’ or ‘structure of feeling’.<sup>22</sup> This thesis draws on all of these definitions of modernity.

Particularly resonant is the description of modernity as ambivalent and contradictory, as Nead expresses, ‘the spaces of modernity have been invoked as a troubling mix of the rational and governable and the fearful and disordered’.<sup>23</sup> The slippery nature of the term is highlighted by Conekin, Mort and Waters, ‘Because of its hybrid character – straddling history and the social sciences - modernity appears both as the ‘subject’ and ‘object’ of discourse. It is at once a philosophical and epistemological category relating to questions of temporality, spatiality and the way knowledge is ordered, but it is also used to designate a more specific range of historical phenomena over time.’<sup>24</sup> They see its definition as a cultural phenomenon as being particularly important: ‘the focus has been on how modernity organises experience and orchestrates conflicting structures of feeling’,<sup>25</sup> although the different meanings have been increasingly muddled and conflated, making it a problematic category for academic researchers. However, these difficulties are counterbalanced by its usefulness as a concept for examining particular historical societies. Whereas initial studies like Berman’s have been criticised for their over-generalised theories, ascribed indiscriminately to an undifferentiated Western society, recent research has moved towards more historically and geographically specific studies, where the texture of modernity at a particular moment can be more meaningfully understood.

Contemporary commentators and historians have located British modernity at different times, evidenced in different ways in each instance. Most work within social and cultural histories has clustered around the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, where a series of factors are seen as leading to a ‘break, a transitional moment within the history of

<sup>20</sup> Berman, Marshall, *All that is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*, London: Verso, 1983, 16-7.

<sup>21</sup> This concept is discussed in detail by Nead. Nead *Victorian Babylon*, 4.

<sup>22</sup> Discussed in Alan O’Shea, ‘English Subjects of Modernity’, in Nava, Mica, and O’Shea, Alan, (eds), *Modern Times: Reflections on a Century of English Modernity*, London: Routledge, 1996.

<sup>23</sup> Nead, *Victorian Babylon*, 4

<sup>24</sup> Conekin, Mort and Waters, *Moments of Modernity*.

<sup>25</sup> Conekin, Mort and Waters, *Moments of Modernity*.



modernity'.<sup>26</sup> For example, Nead identifies modernity within London's new Victorian urban cultures within 'representations of the street; the organization of urban leisure; the poetics of the city at night; and debates on the production and consumption of mass urban culture.'<sup>27</sup> Other authors, including Conekin, Mort and Waters, identify an important sea change in the early post-war period.<sup>28</sup>

There have been fewer claims made for the location of modernity in inter-war Britain. This study identifies a dynamic experience of modernity through the consumption cultures of the 1930s West End. The connected issues of identity, gender, and consumption have indeed emerged as recognised signifiers of modernity.<sup>29</sup> Mort claims, 'Consumption is not some interesting but insignificant byway in the development of modern life, it is intrinsic to the dynamic organisation of economic society and to the human experience of being and becoming modern.'<sup>30</sup> This thesis contends that 'modernity' is an important concept for the study of shopping cultures and consumer identities of the 1930s West End. The language of modernity was most explicit within two areas: firstly narratives of shifting shopping geographies, particularly concepts of the city; and secondly within its architecture, where modern shopping and architectural Modernism collided, contributing in no small way to the perception of 'a new London', and placing consumption centre stage in the discourse of modernity. Notions of urban modernity, and the relationship between modernity and Modernism are explored in further depth in Parts I and II respectively.

## SHOPS AND SHOPPING

Over the last quarter century the subject of consumption has enjoyed a meteoric rise as the focus of research and discussion within a multitude of different disciplines, including history, sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, psychology and geography. This phenomenon is connected to a preoccupation with modernity. It is also linked to an

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<sup>26</sup> Nava and O'Shea's introduction in Nava and O'Shea, *Modern Times*, 2. The positioning a somewhat fluid: for example the break is positioned around 1870 by Dauntton and Rieger in their more economic study. Dauntton, and Rieger, *Meanings of Modernity*.

<sup>27</sup> Nead, *Victorian Babylon*, 5.

<sup>28</sup> Conekin, Mort and Waters, *Moments of Modernity*.

<sup>29</sup> The work of Breward, Nava and Rappaport is particularly successful in this respect, focussing on the Victorian and Edwardian eras. Breward *The Hidden Consumer*; Mica Nava, 'Modernity's Disavowal: Women, the city and the department store', in Mica Nava and Alan O'Shea (eds), *Modern Times: Reflections on a Century of English Modernity*, London: Routledge, 1996; Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*.

<sup>30</sup> Frank Mort, 'Paths to Mass Consumption: Historical Perspectives' in Jackson et al., *Commercial Cultures: Economies, Practices, Spaces*, Oxford and New York: Berg, 2000, 12.



increasing dissatisfaction with the dominance of production-led explanations for historical trends, and to an increasing recognition of the importance of consumption as a powerful force in contemporary society.<sup>31</sup> Much of the historical work has been interested in uncovering the beginnings of modern consumer society, initially pinpointed by McKendrick, Brewer and Plumb as occurring in the late eighteenth century,<sup>32</sup> but subsequently identified in both earlier and later periods.<sup>33</sup> Certainly, by the 1930s, the prominence of shopping cultures and consumer identities within national cultural life suggested by the source material indicates that consumer society was very well established, and so different research questions come to the fore.

In recent years there has been a loss of faith in the overarching theories of consumption that have dominated consumption studies, largely because they have not been sufficiently temporally and geographically grounded.<sup>34</sup> Some have also criticised the field for failing to engage sufficiently with the specific shopping practices.<sup>35</sup> However, the increase in *shopping* for goods, and the display of goods *within* shops, have been consistently recognised as two of the clearest identifiable characteristics of modern consumer society.<sup>36</sup> In addition, retail formats have been enduringly emblematic, structuring many of these studies. It is true, however, that an obsessive concern with modernity and newness has produced a particular account of the history of shops and shopping cultures. Miller et al. relate how during the late 1980s and early 1990s the story of modern consumption coincided with a particular genealogy of the shop; ‘an accepted natural history of consumption took shape which, identifying consumption as a key characteristic of modernity, described an arc from the arcades and department stores of Paris through to the shopping malls of the United States.’<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> This rise is discussed in Pasi Falk and Colin Campbell (eds.), *The Shopping Experience*, London: Sage, 1997, Daniel Miller, et al., *Shopping, Place and Identity*, London: Routledge, 1998, Chapter 1; Colin Campbell, ‘The Sociology of Consumption’, Paul Glennie, ‘Consumption within Historical Studies’ and Daniel Miller, ‘Consumption as the Vanguard of History: A Polemic by Way of Introduction’, in Miller, Daniel (ed.), *Acknowledging Consumption: A Review of New Studies*, London: Routledge, 1995.

<sup>32</sup> Neil McKendrick, John Brewer and J. H. Plumb, *The Birth of Consumer Society*, London: Europa, 1982.

<sup>33</sup> Celia Lury identifies consumer society as a post war euro-US phenomenon. Celia Lury, *Consumer Culture*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996, 3. Mort notes a cluster of work on the post-war period ‘Consumption has become one of the grand narratives of the second half of the twentieth century.’ Mort, ‘Paths to Mass Consumption’, 7. Benson and Ugolini, on the other hand, have highlighted the recent work of early modern historians on ‘modern’ consumption trends that predate the industrial revolution. John Benson and Laura Ugolini (eds.), *A Nation of Shopkeepers: Five Centuries of British Retailing*, London: I. B. Taurus, 2003, 1-2.

<sup>34</sup> See for example, Peter Jackson et al., *Commercial Cultures: Economies, Practices, Spaces*, Oxford and New York: Berg, 2000, 2.

<sup>35</sup> Miller et al. *Shopping, Place and Identity*, Chapter 1.

<sup>36</sup> Rosalind Williams, *Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth Century France*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982, 3.

<sup>37</sup> Miller et al. *Shopping, Place and Identity*, 3.



This work has led to a collective shopping history inflected by strictly periodised interpretations of modernity. For example, the department store has been identified with the modern themes of leisure, the growth of the middle classes, the democratisation of 'luxury' consumer goods, urbanisation and shifts in gender definitions and relations.<sup>38</sup> On the other hand the supermarket has been viewed through the filter of post-war modernity: in terms of the exercise of housewives' skill, standardisation, and suburbanisation. Moving on, Campbell suggests sociologists have treated the later twentieth-century mall as 'the very embodiment of the postmodern condition', often based on little focused research.<sup>39</sup> This approach has allowed enlightening comparisons to be made between different cultural meanings of shopping. For example, Bowlby has compared the experience of the supermarket and department store, concluding that, 'It was the difference between going shopping – an open-ended pleasurable, perhaps transgressive experience – and doing the shopping, a regular task to be done with the minimum expenditure of time, labour and money.'<sup>40</sup> However, within this narrative, much of the texture of shopping cultures has been lost, themes of continuity and diversity written out.

These approaches certainly reflect the use of shopping to illustrate the polemical social comments of historical observers, such as Emile Zola's epic department store novel, *The Ladies Paradise*.<sup>41</sup> But several of these studies also reveal a distinctly ahistorical conceptualisation of consumption. There is, however, a quieter, but growing field of dedicated retail history that aims for a more focused understanding of context. The earliest work in this genre comprised celebratory business histories, and accounts of retail progress.<sup>42</sup> More recent contributions, drawn primarily from social, economic and, increasingly, cultural history, carry out extremely useful empirical studies of shops and

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<sup>38</sup> See for example Rachel Bowlby, *Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing and Zola*, London: Methuen, 1985; Rachel Bowlby, *Carried Away: The Invention of Modern Shopping*, London: Faber and Faber, 2000; Mona Domosh, 'The Feminised Retail Landscape: Gender Ideology and Consumer Culture in Nineteenth-Century New York City,' Neil Wrigley and Michelle Lowe (eds), *Retailing, Consumption and Capital: Towards the New Retail Geography*, Harlow: Longman, 1996; Bill Lancaster, *The Department Store: A Social History*, London and New York: Leicester University Press, 1995; William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power and the Rise of a New American Culture*, New York: Vintage, 1993; Michael Miller, *The Bon Marché: Bourgeois Culture and the Department Store, 1869 - 1920*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981; Nava, 'Modernity's Disavowal'; Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*; Gail Reekie, *Temptations: Sex, Selling and the Department Store*, St Leonards NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1993.

<sup>39</sup> Campbell, 'The Sociology of Consumption'.

<sup>40</sup> Discussed in Bowlby, *Carried Away*, 13.

<sup>41</sup> Emile Zola, *The Ladies' Paradise*, Oxford University Press, 1998.

<sup>42</sup> These more traditional accounts include, Alison Adburgham, *Shops and Shopping: Where, and in What Manner the Well-dressed Englishwoman Bought her Clothes*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1964; Asa Briggs, *Friends of the People: the Centenary History of Lewis's*, London: Batsford, 1956; Dorothy Davis, *A History of Shopping*, London: Routledge and Kegan, 1966.



shopping, whilst embracing the more thematic agenda offered by consumption studies and thus provide a way forward.<sup>43</sup>

Retail forms of the 1930s West End have received comparatively little attention, sandwiched between the spectacle of late nineteenth-century Oxford and Regent Streets' department stores, and Carnaby Street's alternative boutiques in post-war 'Swinging London'. This gap reflects the period's supposed low importance within the broader history of consumption, and the comparative lack of retail 'novelty' within the metropolitan centre. Part of the problem lies in an unwillingness to study shopping cultures which were not essentially novel. Thus, because of their well-established nature, scant attention is given to the big London department stores in the inter-war years. It is worth noting that to some extent historians have been guilty of being seduced by the Victorian department store owners' rhetoric of progress, sometimes failing to distinguish between description and advertisement, and ignoring a parallel trend of continuity with earlier retail cultures.<sup>44</sup> Although assumed to be past their Victorian and Edwardian hey-day, this thesis reveals that department stores still had a significant role to play within luxury West End consumption practices, and were still sufficiently successful to expand and rebuild. Any assessment of significant decline in metropolitan department store fortunes must therefore be reserved for the post-war period.

Such work on inter-war shopping that does exist concentrates on the rise of the multiple shop, and relatedly, the suburban and provincial centre.<sup>45</sup> Although undoubtedly important, these developments do not account for the continued importance of London as a shopping hub, and focus on lower-middle-class and affluent working-class consumer bases. Gronberg has offered an alternative model, discussing the Parisian boutique as a symbol of urban modernity. Her study is however of simulated shops within an exhibition context, and is therefore distanced from actual shopping practices.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Benson and Ugolini (eds.), *A Nation of Shopkeepers*; Geoffrey Crossick and Serge Jaumain, (eds.) *Cathedrals of Consumption: the European Department Store*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999; Lancaster, *The Department Store*; Miller, *The Bon Marché*.

<sup>44</sup> This point is made in Geoffrey Crossick and Serge Jaumain, 'The World of the Department Store: Distribution, Culture and Social Change' and Claire Walsh, 'The Newness of the Department Store: a View from the Eighteenth Century', Geoffrey Crossick and Serge Jaumain, (eds.) *Cathedrals of Consumption: the European Department Store*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999.

<sup>45</sup> For example, Katrina, Honeyman, 'Following Suit: Men, Masculinity and Gendered Practices in the Clothing Trade in Leeds, England, 1890 - 1940', *Gender and History*, vol.14, no.3, November 2002, 426-446; Winship, 'Culture of Restraint'.

<sup>46</sup> Tag Gronberg, *Designs on Modernity: Exhibiting the City in 1920's Paris*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998.



Rather than looking exclusively at one type of shop, the approach of this thesis is also to consider the collective landscape of shops: department stores, multiples, outfitters, boutiques, which were configured in particular ways into the West End's shopping streets. These shops were united by their sale of fashionable goods, particularly clothing. Therefore this study relates to a body of work that has been concerned with this more exclusive and clothing-based kind of retailing and shopping.<sup>47</sup> This was about pleasure as much as provisioning, a leisure activity as much as a task. The shops were also united by the cultures of the West End.

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This research offers a new, integrated study of inter-war shopping, structured through a series of linked studies of West End shopping routes and networks, retail architecture, spectacle, and consumer types. This method draws on the example of Nead and Rappaport's studies of London, each conducting a series of interconnected case studies, using a breadth of sources to construct a rich, multifaceted account of urban cultures. Nead discusses the modernity of Victorian London through discussions of mapping, large scale building projects, lighting and the sale of obscene publications.<sup>48</sup> Rappaport's research on the prominence of women within Victorian and Edwardian West End consumption moves from a study of department stores to the politics of women's clubland, from the provision of public toilets to musical comedy.<sup>49</sup> Thus, rather than testing a single hypothesis, the thesis seeks to explore the complexity of West End shopping cultures by exploring four particularly important elements of it.

The approach is therefore interdisciplinary, and the different literatures of modernity, geography, gender, class, architecture, fashion, shopping and the urban are examined as the thesis develops. Its sources are also diverse. Particularly important are the narratives of the West End and its shopping cultures to be found in a mixture of popular and professional texts: women's magazines, newspapers, tourist guides, department store records, the architectural, advertising and retailing periodical presses and other urban commentaries. These textual accounts are repeatedly drawn back to the material city through a

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<sup>47</sup> Fiona Anderson, 'Fashioning the Gentleman: A Study of Henry Poole and Co., Savile Row Tailors 1861-1900', *Fashion Theory*, Vol.4, 2000, 405-426; Breward *The Hidden Consumer*; Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*; Laura Ugolini, 'Clothes and the Modern Man'.

<sup>48</sup> Nead, *Victorian Babylon*.

<sup>49</sup> Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*.



consideration of more visual evidence: the West End's built fabric itself, and photographs recording its spaces, its displays, its pageantry and evoking its exciting kineticism. The nature of individual sources is examined as they arise through the thesis. It is, however, worth noting here that the way the material is used reflects a distinctive feature of this thesis: a focus on the convergence of shopping cultures, modernity, new consumer identities and fashionability in the *streets* of London's West End, rather than on the shop-floor, in display departments or boardrooms of its stores. The sources are therefore read as guides to the space of the shopping street, and to the layer of walls and windows that separated street from store, where the essence of metropolitan shopping cultures was positioned.

Existing work on shopping, even when concerned with geographically specific shopping cultures, has centred on the figure of the consumer, or the business of selling.<sup>50</sup> Although this thesis considers both of these things, its subject is rather the West End itself. It argues that metropolitan shopping cultures were infused with a sense of this place, just as Gronberg describes Parisian boutiques as emblematic of Paris during the 1920s.<sup>51</sup> It provides a spatial context for a connected consideration of design, spectacle, identity and shopping. It also argues that the West End's shops contributed in significant ways to the identity of inter-war London. Part I therefore sets out this territory, with a consideration of shopping geographies. It positions the West End as a hub within local, national and international shopping networks. It also looks at the internal geographies of the West End; exploring how shopping routes were constructed differently according to gender and class, shifting as new consumer cultures developed, with case studies of Simpsons' spatial positioning, and *Vogue* shopping maps.

Part II discusses the retail architecture of the West End, with a central case study of two new Modern shops, Simpsons and Peter Jones. Although retail architecture has hitherto been little explored, this thesis reveals it as a significant means by which the West End was transformed and its modernity articulated during the 1930s. Modernism was an important arrival in the West End's retail sector; a radically new architectural approach that brought with it troubled relationships with consumption, femininity and spectacle. The study reassesses the connections between these things, which have often been deemed irreconcilable. It also questions perceptions of the relatively low impact of British

<sup>50</sup> See, for example, Breward, *The Hidden Consumer*; Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*.

<sup>51</sup> Gronberg, *Designs on Modernity*, 55-59.



Modernism within an international context by showing how retail architecture was a key element of the architectural profession's renaissance.

Part III is concerned with the spectacle and theatre of shopping, which has been an important strand in histories of shopping and of the urban, identified as a signifier of modern consumer cultures. It examines the various ways in which shopping cultures were 'staged' within the West End street: window display, façade lighting and decoration, and pageantry. It reveals a much more 'knowing' use and reception of spectacle than had been apparent in the Victorian and Edwardian eras, the established strategies being used in new ways to stage modernity, new consumer cultures and the West End itself.

Part IV draws the thesis to a close, turning to the consumer identities that were reflected by, and constructed through, the shopping cultures described in the earlier parts of the study. The unstable relationships between place, design, retailing practices and gender mean that these things can be used as a way understanding shifting notions of modern metropolitan consumer identities. It foregrounds two particular consumer types, the 'Simpsons man' and the *Vogue* woman 'of limited income', who embodied and constructed the new shopping cultures and practices. It positions them within a genealogy of consumer types, considering the role of consumer identity within studies of shopping and consumption.

Ultimately, this research makes the case that an important kind of inter-war modernity is evidenced by these fashionable metropolitan shopping cultures, which must be allowed to sit alongside received understandings of the nature of 1930s Britain and the history of modernity and shopping. It uncovers the West End as the location of these cultures, recognising that ripples were sent further out, to other places where the West End held meaning.

I

SHOPPING GEOGRAPHIES OF THE  
WEST END

## 2.

### INTRODUCTION I

‘Simpson Piccadilly’ is necessary – as the keystone of Simpson’s fighting policy. Imagine in the heart of London’s smart West End, a vast new modern building wholly devoted to a complete range of Simpson-tailored garments. Imagine the millions who will daily pass its windows, talk of it, visit it. A men’s store second to none in size and position, it will immediately invest the name of Simpson with an overwhelming first-class West End reputation.

(Memorandum issued to small retailers of Simpson Ltd clothes nationwide, c.1935. Simpsons Archive.)

This was the rallying cry of a successful, modern, nationally-distributing menswear manufacturer, on the brink of its first, and hugely expensive retail venture. It introduces the one of the primary arguments of this research: that concepts of ‘place’ were at the centre of 1930s shopping cultures: infusing shopping practices, retail strategies and narratives of consumption. This thesis is concerned with 1930s shopping cultures in the core of London’s West End, the place where Simpson Ltd decided to build its store. Part I examines the pivotal relationship between consumption practices and location, a relationship which underpins the thesis as a whole, as it moves on to discuss retail architecture, the spectacle of shopping and consumer identities.

Part I establishes the continued importance of urban consumption cultures, in particular arguing for the importance of the West End as retail area during the period. It considers the nature the West End by looking at how it was mapped and listed in maps and directories, how it was captured in photographs and, most importantly, how it was represented in women’s



magazines and newspapers, and promoted in tourist guides and department store publicity. The study stresses the role of maps, routes and networks in conceptualising this kind of shopping: Chapter 3 places the West End within a broader national and international shopping networks, then Chapter 4 turns to the West End's component micro-geographies, through a consideration of its shopping streets. As part of this, it considers how streets were juxtaposed and connected into routes. It also explores how these routes were experienced and navigated. It introduces the street as another common thread running through the thesis: a point of intersection in the relationship between consumption and the city, where important parts of shopping cultures were located. In this, it differs from the majority of existing studies of consumption, which have focussed on the transactions within store interiors and also on the drive for consumption originating in the home.

Thus, Part I is primarily an examination of the importance of geographies in understanding 1930s consumption cultures, through a case study of the significance of one particular place. Four principal points are made. Firstly, the West End held an important role within British consumption cultures, evidenced in the way both London and shopping were conceptualised and constructed by magazines, department stores, tourist guides and consumers. Secondly, the West End's special identity has to be considered relationally. The area must be positioned with national and international networks of shopping, and read through the web of smaller shopping routes which comprised it. Thirdly, notions of place and space not only constructed real cities through the fabric of their buildings and streets, but also worked on a conceptual level; and that the city's shopping geographies were experienced on both levels. Finally, the diversity of different shopping routes, and the way they were constantly reconfigured, was part of the city's constant dialogue with gender, class and modernity.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND SOURCES

### GEOGRAPHIES OF CONSUMPTION

This chapter is positioned primarily in relation to ideas about the spatiality of consumption practices and cultures, interpreting them in terms of places, networks and routes. Space and place have been important concerns for strands of consumption studies from the late 1980s



onwards,<sup>1</sup> reflecting a more spatial understanding of a variety of academic disciplines, from architectural history to gender studies.<sup>2</sup> In addition to encouraging a close attention to the meaning of place, the existing terrain has particularly highlighted the location of modernity and the spatiality of identity, relating to broader interdisciplinary work on these subjects.<sup>3</sup> The spatial debates within consumption studies can be seen to cluster around two main issues, both of which have resonance for this thesis.

One cluster has differentiated consumption cultures as urban, suburban, provincial and so on. This has been an important theme within work on late nineteenth-century consumption, which has collectively highlighted the essentially urban, even metropolitan, nature of emerging modern consumer society.<sup>4</sup> These studies have singled out certain cities, notably Paris, Berlin, London, New York and Chicago, as key locations of modern shopping cultures, a designation which is often linked to their operation as fashion cities within an international arena. Another group of more contemporary studies has displayed a particular interest in these relationships between consumption and place constructed and reflected gendered identities, for example, Mort and Nixon's studies of new metropolitan masculinities in the 1980s and 90s.<sup>5</sup> A strong argument has already been made by historians including Adburgham, Breward, Hobhouse and Rappaport for the West End's development as a centre of fashionable consumption and consumer identities during the nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup>

The other cluster of literature has addressed the connected issue of how shopping geographies are reconfigured, maps shift to accommodate evolving consumer and retail cultures. Some studies of the early department store have considered in passing how shopping practices contributed to the reconfiguration of cities.<sup>7</sup> The theme is rather less well explored with regard to inter-war shopping geographies, with the exception of Longstreth's excellent studies of transformations in the relationship between urban, suburban and out-of-town, connected with

<sup>1</sup> This point is made in Miller et. al., *Shopping, Place and Identity*.

<sup>2</sup> See for example Beatriz Colomina (ed.), *Sexuality and Space*, Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992.

<sup>3</sup> Borden et al. note the recent interest on the spatial nature of identity in Iain Borden, Jane Rendell and Helen Thomas, 'Knowing Different Cities: Reflections on Recent European Writings on Cities and Planning History' in Sandercock, Leonie (ed.), *Making the Invisible Visible: a Multicultural Planning History*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998, 140.

<sup>4</sup> See for example Bowlby, *Just Looking*; Breward *The Hidden Consumer*; Domosh, 'The Feminised Retail Landscape'; Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*.

<sup>5</sup> Mort, *Cultures of Consumption*; Sean Nixon, *Hard Looks: Masculinities, Spectatorship and Contemporary Consumption*, London: UCL, 1996.

<sup>6</sup> See Adburgham, *Shops and Shopping*; Breward *The Hidden Consumer*; Hermione Hobhouse, *A History of Regent Street*, London: MacDonald and Jane's, 1975 and Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*.

<sup>7</sup> See for example, Kathleen James, 'From Messel to Mendelsohn: German Department Store Architecture in Defence of Urban and Economic Change,' in Geoffrey Crossick and Serge Jaumain (eds.), *Cathedrals of Consumption: the European Department Store*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999.



new kinds of shopping in Los Angeles.<sup>8</sup> The subject has been a more prominent concern for studies of the post-war consumption landscape, which have shown how the new ‘mall’ retail format disrupted existing relationships between urban, suburban and out-of-town areas.<sup>9</sup> Academic work on the mall reflects the feminist re-evaluation of the significance of everyday shopping practices. It has partly been stimulated by contemporary concerns about the effects of this reorientation of shopping geographies on urban and planning policies.<sup>10</sup> This theme of reorientation has informed the approach of this thesis to the West End, encouraging a consideration of metropolitan shopping within the shifting terrain of inter-war consumption.

This study also adopts an approach that has been relatively underdeveloped within existing work: addressing configurations of a smaller scale, by looking at the makeup of shopping routes *within* the West End. The studies by Breward and Rappaport respectively of masculine and feminine shopping routes within the Victorian and Edwardian West End provide important building blocks. Viewed together, their work describes the development of distinct shopping areas and shopping routes for men and women, and for masculine and feminine consumption practices, through the editing processes of written media, stores and consumers. Rappaport is concerned with the establishment of a feminine stronghold in the West End. She argues that by the outbreak of World War One, a new kind of feminine consumption was flourishing, centred on the major department stores along Regent Street and Oxford Street, whilst also highlighting the presence of respectable women in these streets and in the semi-public space of the new department store within them.<sup>11</sup> The backdrop for Breward’s study of masculine consumption practices is the coexistent, older geography of men’s retail outlets, threading through the back streets of the West End, the terrain of fashionable male consumers in the period.

Reflecting on these two connected clusters of literature addressing geographies of consumption and urban modernity, it is apparent that whilst existing work has provided a useful methodology for approaching this spatialised study of West End shopping, there remain key gaps in the terrain. So far, the majority of work has focused on the Victorian and Edwardian periods. The backdrop for these studies has been a London viewed through a

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<sup>8</sup> Richard Longstreth, *City Centre to Regional Mall: Architecture, the Automobile, and Retailing in Los Angeles, 1920 - 1950*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT, 1997; Richard Longstreth, *The Drive-in, the Supermarket and the Transformation of Commercial Space in Los Angeles, 1914 - 1941*, Cambridge Mass.: MIT, 1999.

<sup>9</sup> Work on the mall includes Miller et. al., *Shopping, Place and Identity*, a study of Brent Cross and Wood Green in London.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, *The Effects of Major Out of Town Retail Development: A literature Review for the Department of the Environment*, London: HMSO, 1992.

<sup>11</sup> Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*.



framework of polarities: pleasure and anxiety, safety and danger, respectability and immorality, as Nava summarises, ‘The British version of this imagined geography tended to stress the disturbing aspects of the urban environment, the chaos and pollution, moral and sexual dissolution and the erosion of traditional order. In this narrative the threatening nature of the city regularly operated as a counterpoint to the ideal of a virtuous and harmonious rural or suburban domestic existence.’<sup>12</sup>

A study of the West End in the 1930s addresses a very different historical moment: the West End continued to be an important centre of fashionable consumption, and the shopping cultures under scrutiny were distinctly metropolitan. However, the place functioned differently as a nexus for debates about gender, class, shopping and urban modernity. As Part I indicates, this was a West End that was quite differently mythologised, configured and navigated. This thesis re-examines in particular the gendered shopping routes within the 1930s West End, painting a rather different picture of reconfiguration, blurring and overlap.

As part of this investigation, Miller’s suggestion that place is ‘the effect and not the pre-given premise of the shopping encounter’ is considered.<sup>13</sup> The study looks at the way place was constructed and routes configured by the collective practices of consumers, the fashion and tourist press and entrepreneurs that comprised consumer culture, and thus contributes to recent work within planning history which challenges the exclusive role given to the official planner and urban designer in defining the spatiality of cities.<sup>14</sup>

## URBAN MODERNITY.

Chapter 1 has already highlighted the central theme of modernity within studies of consumption. Part I addresses this theme geographically, seeking to make connections between 1930s British modernity, Modernism and West End consumption cultures. It therefore draws on existing work in a variety of disciplines which has established space as what Nead has termed an ‘active agent of modernity’. She writes, ‘Space is never a passive backdrop for the formation of historical identities and experiences, but is an active constituent

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<sup>12</sup> Nava, ‘Modernity’s Disavowal’, 42.

<sup>13</sup> Miller, *Shopping, Place and Identity*, 189.

<sup>14</sup> This new direction is discussed in Borden et al., ‘Knowing Different Cities’.



of historical consciousness, whether experienced on the street, the Underground, or from above the city in the car of a balloon.<sup>15</sup>

The city and city street have been shown to be especially important sites of modernity and the Modern, a theme explored in Berman's seminal work, *All That is Solid Melts into Air*.<sup>16</sup> Much of the work on the subject has been concerned with the mid to late nineteenth century.<sup>17</sup> For example, Nava writes, 'More than any other social force of the nineteenth century, the city evoked the freedom as well as the menace that characterised the modern experience. Throughout this period it grew as a territory not only spatially but also in terms of its cultural significance, in the way in which it was understood and represented.'<sup>18</sup> Studies of the twentieth century have made claims for the continued connection between modernity and the urban, although this connection is usually articulated in terms of heroic futuristic planning rather than popular consumption practices.<sup>19</sup>

Historians and geographers have both called for a spatial understanding of modernity, but one that allows for geographical as well as temporal specificity.<sup>20</sup> For example, Daunton and Rieger have pointed out that the British experience of modernity between 1870 and 1940 was associated with significantly less tumult than on the continent, and as a result British concepts of modernity were permeated with 'narratives of continuous change' and stability.<sup>21</sup> A number of particular cities have generally been accorded a prominent place in modernity's history, emerging again and again in studies across the academic spectrum. London, alongside Paris and Berlin, has certainly been identified as an important location, described by Nead as 'part of a highly concentrated discourse on the modern' during the Victorian period.<sup>22</sup> She tracks its modernity through representations of its streets, urban leisure practices, the poetics of the city at night, and debates on the production and consumption of mass urban culture, which collectively defined it. Modernity for Nead is about the nineteenth-century forging of a

<sup>15</sup> Nead, *Victorian Babylon*, 8

<sup>16</sup> Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air*. It should be noted however that a case has also been made for the importance of the suburb in stories of British modernity. See for example, David Gilbert and Rebecca Preston, 'Stop being so English': Suburban Modernity and National Identity in the Twentieth Century', in David Gilbert, David Matless, and Brian Short (eds.), *Geographies of British Modernity*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2003.

<sup>17</sup> Nava, 'Modernity's Disavowal'; Nead, *Victorian Babylon*; Wolff *Feminine Sentences*; James Donald, *Imagining the Modern City*, London: Athlone Press 1999, 42-51.

<sup>18</sup> Nava, 'Modernity's Disavowal', 42.

<sup>19</sup> See for example Gold, John, 'The Death of the Boulevard' in Fyfe, Nicholas, (ed.), *Images of the Street: Planning, Identity and Control in Public Space*, London and New York: Routledge, 1998; Decker, Thomas (ed.), *The Modern City Revisited*, London and New York: Spon, 2000.

<sup>20</sup> This point is made in Miles Ogborn, *Spaces of Modernity: London's Geographies 1680 - 1780*, London: Guilford, 1998 and Gilbert et. al., 'Historical Geographies of British Modernity'; O'Shea, 'English Subjects of Modernity'.

<sup>21</sup> Daunton and Rieger, *Meanings of Modernity*, Introduction.

<sup>22</sup> Nead, *Victorian Babylon*, 5.



modern metropolis: local governments' rationalising projects of roads, sewers, gas, and mapping constructing a discourse of 'progress', which was in constant tension with its 'other': chaotic old urban forms and cultures, which made London into a kind of 'Babylon'. This thesis argues that London remained an important place for the negotiation of modernity in the 1930s, but suggests that the West End's shopping streets had now become a key site: where modernity was articulated through architecture, display and shopping identities

## GENDER AND SHOPPING IN THE MODERN CITY

Part I is particularly contextualised within debates about gender and the urban, also drawing on a broader field of the spatial nature of gender, and the gendered nature of space.<sup>23</sup> For example, in *The Sphinx in the City*, Wilson offers an understanding of the city as gendered as both feminine and masculine, creating an integral polarity. She writes:

Despite its crowds and the mass nature of its life, and despite its bureaucratic conformity, at every turn the city dweller is also offered the opposite - pleasure, deviation, disruption. In this sense it would be possible to say that the male and female 'principles' war with each other at the very heart of city life. The city is 'masculine' in its triumphal scale, its towers and vistas and arid industrial regions; it is 'feminine' in its enclosing embrace, in its indeterminacy and labyrinthine uncentredness. We might even go so far as to claim that urban life is actually based on this perpetual struggle between rigid routinised order and pleasurable anarchy, the male-female dichotomy.<sup>24</sup>

This thesis, however, is focussed not directly on the gendering of the city itself, but on the construction of gendered consumer identities through engagement with the city. Part I looks at the dynamic movement of a series of gendered figures to and through the 1930s West End: purposeful shoppers, tourists and other visitors. Importantly, work on the male *flâneur* has connected the construction of identity and of the urban with the activity of traversing the city. Until recent years, however, women, femininity and consumption have been largely absent from discourses about modernity, as Wolff stated, 'The literature of modernity describes the experience of men'.<sup>25</sup> Wolff has been instrumental highlighting the *masculinity* of the *flâneur*'s experience Wolff attributes this to an overriding attention paid by both the discourse and its

<sup>23</sup> See for example, Linda McDowell, *Gender, Identity and Place: Understanding Feminist Geographies*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999; Jane Rendell, *The Pursuit of Pleasure: Gender, Space and Architecture in Regency London*, London: Athlone Press, 2002.

<sup>24</sup> Elizabeth Wilson: *The Sphinx in the City: Urban Life, the Control of Disorder, and Women*, University of California Press: Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford, 1991, 7.

<sup>25</sup> Wolff, *Feminine Sentences*, 46.



critics to the Baudelairean male *flâneur* and a related exclusion of women from public city life, by which concepts of modernity were defined. The few women included within discussions of modernity were admitted by virtue of being objects of the *flâneur*'s gaze; the prostitute, the widow, the lesbian, the murder victim, and the passing unknown woman.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, in the rare intrusions of consumption into this discourse, it was seen through the eyes of the dissociated observer of the scene: the *flâneur*, rather than the participants: the shoppers. Wolff emphatically denied that women's experience of shopping in nineteenth-century department stores or otherwise traversing the city could be a part of the story of modernity, as she denied the possibility of a *flâneuse*, who could experience 'the fleeting, anonymous encounter and the purposeless strolling' of the *flâneur*.<sup>27</sup>

However, revisionist work has responded to the limitations in theories of urban modernity pointed out by Wolff, by questioning the male *flâneur*'s exclusive rights to the modern experience. This work reinterprets the absence of women from the discourse as a reflection of attitudes towards women and consumption within that discourse, not a reflection of women's actual experience of modernity, drawing on Amanda Vickery's assertion that the prominence of Victorian separate spheres ideology suggested anxiety that women were *not* being successfully confined to the home.<sup>28</sup> This new approach has required a redefinition of modernity, and has also contributed to a broader problematisation of the relationship between modernity and its supposed 'other'.<sup>29</sup> Part of the reclamation of modernity as a feminine experience has involved the relocation of modernity to the domestic sphere, with Light suggesting the particular importance of the inter-war years in this respect for

marking for many women their entry into modernity, a modernity which was felt and lived in the most interior and private of places ... even if a new commercial culture of 'home-making' was conservative in assuming this to be a female sphere, it nevertheless put woman and the home, and a whole panoply of connected issues, at the centre of national life.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>28</sup> Amanda Vickery, 'Shaking the Separate Spheres', Times Literary Supplement, 12 March 1993, 6, cited in Nava 'Modernity's Disavowal', 42.

<sup>29</sup> See for example, Nead, *Victorian Babylon*; Christopher Reed (ed.), *Not at Home: The Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1996; Mark Wigley, *White Walls, Designer Dresses: The Fashioning of Modern Architecture*. Cambridge, Massachusetts. 1995.

<sup>30</sup> Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism between the Wars*, London and New York: Routledge, 1991, 10.



On the other hand, a number of significant histories have now recast women as symbols of modernity by repositioning them within the city.<sup>31</sup> Within these narratives, the female shopper has been a recurrent, although not exclusive, focus. This work complicates and challenges the ‘separate spheres’ paradigm, by drawing attention not simply to the presence of women within the public sphere of the city, but also to their agency within urban modernity. For example, work by Nava and Rappaport has shown how Victorian and Edwardian consumption practices established a feminine experience of modernity in the city, involving travelling, walking the streets, encountering strangers, spectatorship and so on.<sup>32</sup> Both also cite numerous other examples of women’s urban engagement, including philanthropy, suffrage campaigning, guide services and tourism. Rappaport, however, advises some caution regarding over-reliance on the claims of department store owners to have instigated women’s access to the city: ‘quite a few recent studies have implied that department stores were responsible for this shift because they offered women a place in the public life of the city. Though department stores did offer women access to the metropolis, the study of these institutions has often inadvertently accepted entrepreneurial rhetoric regarding gender ideals and notions of urban life.’<sup>33</sup>

Nonetheless, this redefinition of modernity to encompass women and consumption is extremely welcome as it provides a more flexible and dynamic framework for discussing the modern city, as Nava expresses:

[by highlighting] the complexity and danger as well as the richness and excitement of everyday life in the modern city, it draws attention to the texture of commonplace experiences in the metropolis, to an environment characterized by continuous flux and frequent encounters with strangers, in which signs and appearances acquire a new importance and substitute increasingly for traditional narratives of social and geographical belonging. There is a new stress on display and the visual – on looking. ... It signals the destabilising of many nineteenth-century conventions and highlights the pessimism as well as boldness of the modern imagination. And yet throughout it suggests a kind of *forward-lookingness* and in a way ... of making oneself at home in the chaos – ‘the maelstrom’ – of modern life, of becoming the subjects as well as the objects of modernisation.<sup>34</sup>

Modernity’s complex relationship with its other is discussed in further depth in relation to 1930s Modernism in Part II.

<sup>31</sup> See for example Elaine Abelson, *When Ladies Go a-Thieving: Middle-Class Shoplifters in the Victorian Department Store*, Oxford and New York, 1989; Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*; Rendell, *The Pursuit of Pleasure*; Wilson: *The Sphinx in the City*; Williams, *Dream Worlds*.

<sup>32</sup> Nava, ‘Modernity’s Disavowal’; Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*.

<sup>33</sup> Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*, 10.

<sup>34</sup> Nava, ‘Modernity’s Disavowal’, 39.



The usefulness of these critiques of 'separate spheres' in uncovering of a tradition of women's urban experience by Nava, Rappaport, Rendell et al. is apparent for work in the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth-century city, where the model of gender segregated experience has been traditionally situated. The relationship between women, consumption and urban modernity during the 1930s has been altogether less well explored, probably because it does not coincide with the heady years of Victorian and Edwardian modernity. However, the revisionist work is also essential for contextualising inter-war representations of urban femininity, which was portrayed as comparatively unproblematic. This was a period preoccupied with modernity, but it constituted a later stage of modernity with correspondingly different expressions. The West End remained the national focus of fashionable consumption; concerned with the novel and the cutting edge. It also remained a place of cultural importance, where new gender roles were constructed and performed through consumption practices and engagement with the city. It is the contention of this thesis that 1930s modernity was expressed through the negotiation of these urban identities, as well as through the structuring of the West End's streets; with retail architecture, display and spectacle.

## NARRATIVES OF THE SHOPPING CITY.

The sources used in Part I, primarily women's magazines, newspapers, tourist guides, and department store publicity, are invaluable tools for the historian, containing representations of the West End as a place, establishing the relative importance of the West End as a shopping location and explaining its relationship with a series of networks. Part I argues that during the 1930s, these media were also pivotal in *constructing* the West End for their audience through the processes of writing about it, mapping it, photographing it and so on.

They provided particular versions of this West End through a combination of advertising strategies, street maps, directories, commentary and visual images. The resulting representations of the West End can be shown to give readers access to and ownership of the city in two principal ways. Firstly, they functioned straightforwardly as navigational aids to the complex material city. Secondly, they constructed edited versions of the city, which can be seen to constitute the city itself. These narratives can be positioned within a long tradition of constructing and taming cities through writing. Part I argues that both readings position the narratives within a dynamic, complex relationship with the real city: in both they worked as



guides by filtering out particular streets, buildings, activities and inhabitants to enable a coherent navigation of the West End.

This part of the chapter describes how these particular sources were especially suited to their subject matter - the ever-changing real and imagined city - by virtue of their own inherently ephemeral nature. The exploration of the processes of representing and imagining the West End outlined in this chapter will provide the basis for a closer examination of the West End shopping geographies described in Chapters 3 and 4. It also informs the treatment of issues of place throughout the thesis.

This study is situated amongst a body of work with an interest in the processes of ‘editing’ and thus ‘constructing’ a city. It argues that these processes were at the heart of the way the urban was experienced. Historians have principally approached urban editing as a characteristic process of the modern project: highlighting the multitude of strategies for controlling and re-defining the chaotic, irrational city, to create order, legibility, rationality. Within this field, Nead has notably discussed Victorian attempts to rationalise and modernise London through policing, planning, lighting, drainage, business licensing and rebuilding.<sup>35</sup>

The more explicitly ‘geographical’ practices of navigating and mapping the city have also been shown to be integral to the project of modernity. Cosgrove writes, ‘the concept and practice of precise and permanent separation, of spatial ‘fixing’, inherent in boundary definition and conventional mapping ... represent an urge towards classification, order, control and purification. These are today regarded as defining features of a ‘modern’ mentality...’.<sup>36</sup> Key studies have used maps of London to make precisely this point. For example, Nead has described how the process of remapping by Ordnance Survey during the 1860s made the city more navigable, but also changed the way in which the city was thought about.<sup>37</sup> Pike has made similar claims for the Harry Beck’s 1933 Modernist map of the London Underground.<sup>38</sup> These studies indicate that mapping can be seen as a process of editing, of conceptualising the city, suggesting a particular approach to the maps, literal and textual, used in this thesis.

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<sup>35</sup> Nead, *Victorian Babylon*.

<sup>36</sup> Denis Cosgrove (ed.), *Mappings*, London: Reaktion, 1999, 4.

<sup>37</sup> Nead, *Victorian Babylon*.

<sup>38</sup> David Pike, ‘Modernist Space and the Transformation of Underground London’, in Gilbert, Pamela, (ed.) *Imagined Londons*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002, 101-119.



Narratives of navigations of the city, especially blueprints for shopping trips, can similarly be interpreted as having meaning beyond acting as practical navigational tools, but can be seen to constitute mental maps. Rappaport sees the modernity of Victorian and Edwardian London lying in various forms of women's urban excursions, for example those mediated by the Lady Guide Association's chaperones. This thesis uses a set of popular urban narratives to revisit the construction of a modern city through the mapping of consumption. De Certeau's discussion of the dual perspective on the city; the ordered, rational mapped-out view from above, and the chaotic, labyrinthine experience at ground level provides a useful model for approaching the complexity of the 1930s West End shopping map.<sup>39</sup> West End narratives collectively and individually, through text and image, shaped the West End into a map, a 'modern' system of routes, and a mindset, which can be juxtaposed with another lived city that was less easily deciphered, but was more obviously infused with the ephemerality, kineticism, and chaos that were the lifeblood of West End shopping cultures.

The written account: the process of making sense of and shaping the city through text, of which both contemporary commentaries and subsequent theoretical and historical work is a part, is given a particularly important role within this discussion, drawing on an examination of the role of the textual narrative by a variety of authors. For instance, Walkowitz has explored the writings on London by Engels, Dickens and Mayhew, interpreting them as a 'literature of urban exploration' which sought to 'read the illegible city, transforming what appeared to be a chaotic, haphazard environment into a social text that was integrated, knowable and ordered.'<sup>40</sup> Rappaport's work is notable for privileging popular forms of writing in the Victorian and Edwardian project of imposing a sanitised, modern, fashionable, middle class, map over the disorder of city life: the novel, the shopping column of a women's magazine, the news section of a daily newspaper, the theatre review, the guidebook, or the sales talk of a department store advertisement.<sup>41</sup> Her work has been particularly significant in establishing the centrality of these urban editing processes to modern cultures of consumption. It thus provides a useful model for the methodology of this thesis, which searches out the specific places where West End shopping was most meaningfully represented during the 1930s.

<sup>39</sup> Michel de Certeau, Luce Giard and Pierre Mayol, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998.

<sup>40</sup> Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London*, London: Virago, 1992, 18.

<sup>41</sup> Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*, Chapter 4.



This thesis argues that these popular accounts were plainly more than a reflection of the ‘real’ or ‘material’ West End, but can be seen to constitute the city itself. There is a substantial and multidisciplinary body of work that explores the nature of the relationship between text and city. Vasudevan describes the complexity of the dynamic:

... writing the city does not depend on or inadvertently reinscribe the predictable separation between text and city, nor the invariant one-to-one correspondence between representation and reality. The problematic of representation is, moreover, not confined to a form of mimesis whereby the text(s) of the city merely functions as an advertisement for the world as it is. Rather these various texts ‘all carry within themselves their own formative geographies: they are events that enact, that gather into themselves, that compound spatialities of experience, encounter and representation’.<sup>42</sup>

Expanding this approach to encompass the practice of reading, the dual experience of the city - from the pavement, and within these written narratives - relocates the city to the text so that the narratives become the city. Thus boundaries blur between real and written city, and, as Wilson points out, that the city itself becomes a text to be read.<sup>43</sup>

The shift in focus to the practice of ‘reading’ is important for Part I as it suggests ways in which the read narratives could be subsequently subsumed into the consciousness, just as Schlör identifies the lasting effect of accounts and films of the night-time, ‘Once seen, once read, these images accompany our nocturnal walks through the city.’<sup>44</sup> Recent work from a variety of disciplines, notably by Crang and Crang, Donald, Gilbert and Schlör, has made a case for the usefulness of locating cities in a ‘virtual’ or ‘imagined’ level, each study differently interpreting the relationship with the real city.<sup>45</sup> Gilbert going so far as to assert, ‘There are no Londons other than those of the imagination.’<sup>46</sup> Drawing on a tradition of urban writing from Simmel, through Lefebvre, and de Certeau, Donald’s more personal and experiential account describes his version of the ‘imagined’ city,

I am less interested in the literary archaeology than in understanding the imaginary city which, snail-like, I carry around with me ... It has been learned as much from novels, pictures and half-remembered

<sup>42</sup> Alexander Vasudevan, ‘Writing the Asphalt Jungle: Berlin and the Performance of Classical Modernity’, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 2003, vol.21, 169-194. Vasudevan’s quotation is from Gregory, ‘Cultures of Travel and the Spatial Formation of Knowledge’, *Erdkunde*, 54, 2000, 301.

<sup>43</sup> Wilson, *The Sphinx in the City*, 10.

<sup>44</sup> Joachim Schlör, *Nights in the Big City*, London: Reaktion Books, 1998, 11.

<sup>45</sup> Mike Crang, Phil Crang and Jon May, (ed.) *Virtual Geographies: Bodies, Space and Relations*, London: Routledge, 1999; Donald, *Imagining the Modern City*; Pamela Gilbert, (ed.) *Imagined Londons*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002; Schlör, *Nights in the Big City*.

<sup>46</sup> Pamela Gilbert, ‘Imagining Londons’ in Pamela Gilbert, (ed.) *Imagined Londons*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002, 1.



films as from diligent walks round the capital cities of Europe. It embodies perspectives, images, and narratives that migrate across popular fiction, modernist aesthetics, the sociology of urban culture, and techniques for acting on the city.<sup>47</sup>

This approach to the meaning of cities provides a useful framework for this research, which is concerned on one hand with the material West End: its buildings and streets, its window displays and lights, but on the other hand with representations and constructions of the West End, shopping cultures and consumer identities in media such as the women's magazine and tourist guide. Here, Donald's use of the novel provides a useful approach: 'The novel teaches us how to see the city, and how to make sense of it. It defines the co-ordinates for our imaginative mapping of urban space.'<sup>48</sup> He suggests that it is this spatial configuration in the mind of the reader that is crucial, creating an 'imagined environment [that] embraces not just the cities created by the "wagging tongues" of architects, planners and builders, sociologists and novelists, poets and politicians, but also the translation of the places they have made into the imaginary reality of our mental life.'<sup>49</sup>

Schlör articulates this idea slightly differently, talking about a process of 'internal urbanisation', integral to modern life. He describes this process both in terms of how urbanisation affects the activities and mindset of those who experience it, and also the 'creative process of formation of urban behaviours necessary for survival in the city.'<sup>50</sup> Clear parallels can be drawn with the imaginative processes of sketching out shopping routes, practices and identities to readers of women's magazines in the 1930s West End. However, when the other sources are brought into the picture, each suggests different readings. Hence this study is able to highlight the complex layering of different maps of the area with real and imagined boundaries, boundaries that resisted clear definition. The juxtaposition of multiple real and represented West Ends can be seen to create a jumbled, contradictory imagined city for the consumer, and consumer identities can be read from choices about the way it was constructed.

It is significant that the narratives discussed in Part I have in common their ephemeral and temporal nature. This points to their 'modernity', and their ability to constantly renegotiate their relationship with the ever-changing material and conceptual West End. Commentaries on

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<sup>47</sup> Donald, *Imagining the Modern City*, 7

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>50</sup> Schlör, *Nights in the Big City*, 16.



the modern city have frequently highlighted its fleeting nature, drawing on Simmel's depiction of it as a series of events and impressions.<sup>51</sup> Elizabeth Wilson's account, *The Sphinx in the City*, connects this ephemerality with the city's construction as a 'feminine' place, whose pleasures resist rationalisation and order:

One never retraces the same pathway twice, for the city is in a constant process of change, and thus becomes dreamlike and magical, yet also terrifying in the way a dream can be. Life and its certainties slither away under foot. This continual flux and change is one of the most disquieting aspects of the modern city. We expect permanence and stability from the city. Its monuments are solid stone and embody a history that goes back many generations. ... Although its history gives it its character, and a patina of durability, in modernity especially the city becomes ever more changing. That which we thought was most permanent dissolves as rapidly as the kaleidoscopic spectacle of the crowds and vehicles that pass through its streets.<sup>52</sup>

Nead shows how the fear of this flux created an urge to repeatedly re-narrate the city, 'London's past had to be endlessly rewritten and re-imagined; contained through the conventions of text and image and assimilated within a manageable lexicon of the metropolitan picturesque.'<sup>53</sup>

The sources used in this study were each related differently to time, and were themselves ephemeral, as seen in a brief examination of the tourist guide and women's magazine. The proliferation of tourist guidebooks from the mid-nineteenth century created what Rappaport has termed a 'Baedeker-inflected metropolis'.<sup>54</sup> The guides sold on the basis that their version of the city was authoritative and of-the-moment, in contrast with last year's obsolete guide. Some titles proved enduring, regularly reissued in updated form, many others survived for a sole edition. Their temporality belied the repetition of text in successive issues, and cannibalisation of competing guides.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, Gilbert asserts that despite their having been frequently overlooked due to the low-status ascribed to this kind of writing, tourist literature had a dynamic role of in forging concepts of cities,

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<sup>51</sup> Georg Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', in David Frisby and Mike Featherstone (eds.), *Simmel on Culture: Selected Writings*, London: Sage, 1997. This is usefully discussed in Donald, *Imagining the Modern City*, 10-13.

<sup>52</sup> Wilson, *The Sphinx in the City* 3.

<sup>53</sup> Nead, *Victorian Babylon*, 8.

<sup>54</sup> Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*, 108.

<sup>55</sup> The structure of the guide, and its representations of the city are examined in David Gilbert, ' "London in all its glory – or how to enjoy London": guidebook representations of imperial London', *Journal of Historical Geography*, vol 25 no. 3, 1999, 279-197, David Gilbert and Fiona Henderson, 'London and the Tourist Imagination' in Pamela Gilbert, (ed.) *Imagined Londons*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002, 121-136.



The clichés of the guidebooks were neither the simple inventions of their authors nor self-evident expressions of a homogenous and static popular geographical knowledge. Rather, there was a complicated and circular relationship between the changing expectations of the readers and the accounts of place in guidebooks. In the case of London, where the great majority of guides sold were produced by publishing companies based in the city, the interpretation of the city often had to negotiate between a desire to promote the city to visitors, and expressions of current local anxieties about its nature.<sup>56</sup>

*Vogue* was a women's magazine with an 'exclusive' image. It was issued fortnightly, and, even more than its competitors, was intricately connected with the world of fashion and fashionable metropolitan consumption, whose preoccupations of novelty drove the editorial framework and content. Associations with this world dictated an especially heightened importance given to nuanced change. The purchase of successive date-stamped issues was portrayed by publishers as essential to update shopping knowledge:

If you should pick up a *Vogue* of spring 1929, and compare it with the present issue, you would realise very forcibly the great change that fashion has undergone in a year. The year 1929 seems definitely *démodé*. The 1930 woman has a new silhouette, a new spirit, and an entirely new feeling for clothes. There are new intricacies and shadings – all of which make life more interesting for women in general, for shops, and for *Vogue*.<sup>57</sup>

[Figure 2.1] The message about the fleeting nature of fashion was echoed in its mapping of the city. The article, 'London Town is moving round' charted the shifting geographies of fashionable living in the West End, 'All London is on the move as it has been for centuries, though the tempo is faster today. Old sections become *déclassé*, others are renewed, transformed'.<sup>58</sup> Belgravia was plotted on the map as the locus for 'stuffy dowagers' in 1888, 'but very smart' in 1938; Baker Street deemed 'smart' in 1788, 'dowdy' in 1888, and 'smart but sick' in 1938. [Figure 2.2] The magazine's concern with the role of fashion in the fluidity of urban structure was paralleled in other editions, painted most clearly in French *Vogue*'s article, 'Le Rond-Point de la Couture'

Paris est une ville trop vivante pour ne pas se transformer avec les saisons. Une attraction secrète autant qu'impérieuse le fait évoluer vers l'Ouest. Cette migration a pris dans ces derniers mois une cadence accélérée, et le Rond-Point des Champs-Élysées s'appellera bientôt dans le coeur de toutes les femmes 'le Rond-Point de la Couture'. C'est, en effet, plus qu'aucun autre point de la ville la plaque

<sup>56</sup> David Gilbert, "'London in all its glory – or how to enjoy London": guidebook representations of imperial London', *Journal of Historical Geography*, vol 25 no. 3, 1999, 283.

<sup>57</sup> *Vogue* (New York) 15 March 1930, 66.

<sup>58</sup> 'London Town is Moving Round', *Vogue*, 8 June 1938, 72.



tournante qui commande l'arrivée chez la Couturier et la Modiste. L'Avenue Matignon, voilà l'artère principale où bat le pouls toujours fiévreux de l'élégance. Agnès, Reboux, Talbot, Lelong, Rochas, Alix, Fourrures Max, les uns à côté des autres, les uns au dessus des autres, se disputent chaque mètre carré de ce précieux emplacement. Même Worth a déserté la Rue de la Paix et sa vieille tradition pour se rapprocher du cercle enchanté! Dans son rayonnement le plus immédiat, l'Avenue Montaigne est assidûment fréquentée à cause de Mainbocher, et les Champs-Élysées possèdent Maggy Rouff et Heim, ainsi que *Vogue*, placé, on en conviendra, à un bon poste d'observation. C'est dans ce quartier privilégié que la Mode naît, et fait ses premiers pas avant de franchir ses frontières pour vivre sa courte vie.<sup>59</sup>

Magazines, however, had what Beetham terms a 'double relationship with time': 'Each number of a periodical is both of its moment and of a series, different from and yet the same as those which have gone before.'<sup>60</sup> The impression of inbuilt obsolescence masked a certain continuity in the editorial message about matters such as the class and geography of fashionable consumption. Furthermore, the evidence of oral histories suggests that women's magazines were often not treated as 'throwaway', but were rather collected and shared.<sup>61</sup> The publicity manager of Odham's Press identified this as a distinction between weekly and daily publications. The latter's capturing the city afresh each day, shopping coverage placed alongside the reporting of fleeting news events, provided a the version of the city out of date even before it left the press and made newspapers the most ephemeral of printed narratives. He wrote: 'Weekly papers ... are never thrown away, they are passed from friend to friend, and from family to family. Yesterday's daily paper is of interest to nobody.'<sup>62</sup> Beetham has commented on the reappropriative value of this pattern of use, 'The magazine itself becomes ... a medium of exchange among a community of women, a process which circumvents the economic aims of its producers and reasserts an alternative set of values.'<sup>63</sup> This lasting value was especially likely to be ascribed to the expensive, glossy issues of *Vogue*.

<sup>59</sup> 'Le Rond-Point de la Couture' *Vogue* (Paris), December 1935, 29. [Paris is too alive to not reinvent itself along with the seasons. A hidden but powerful force is pulling it westwards. This migration has accelerated during recent months, and the Champs-Élysées roundabout will soon be known in the hearts of all women as the 'roundabout of couture'. More than anywhere else in the city it represents the gateway controlling access to the couturier and milliner. The Avenue Matignon is the principal artery where the pulse of elegance beats furiously. Agnès, Reboux, Talbot, Lelong, Rochas, Alix, Fourrures Max, next to each other, on top of each other, fight over each square metre of this precious location. Even Worth has deserted the stuffy Rue de la Paix to move closer to this enchanted circle. Basking in its shadow, l'Avenue Montaigne draws faithful visitors to Mainbocher, and the Champs-Élysées houses Maggy Rouff and Heim, as well as *Vogue*, positioned conveniently to oversee proceedings. Its in this rich terrain that fashions are born and take their first steps before flying the nest to live out their fleeting existence.]

<sup>60</sup> Margaret Beetham, *A Magazine of her own? Domesticity and Desire in the Woman's Magazine 1800 – 1914*, London: Routledge, 1996, 12.

<sup>61</sup> This pattern of usage is reflected in the discussion of magazines in the oral history collection, 'Home dressmaking Reassessed', AV550, Hampshire Record Office; Bronwen Edwards, 'Home Dressmaking 1939-1945: The Needle at War', MA thesis, V&A Museum and Royal College of Art, 1997.

<sup>62</sup> 'The Power of the Weekly Press', *Commercial Art and Industry*, September 1934, 83 - 91.

<sup>63</sup> Beetham, *A Magazine of her own?* 2.



The 1930s was an era with a heightened awareness of the shifting national geographies of shopping, not least because of the transformations occasioned by expansions of suburban centres and the impact of chains. Lawrence Neal lamented the very instability of these geographies: ‘the thoroughfares in and out of London are littered with derelict shopping areas that have fortuitously risen and then fallen with the popularity and decline of their surrounding neighbourhoods.’<sup>64</sup> Collectively the urban accounts provided in the sources discussed in this thesis provided constantly updated maps of *West End* shopping, reflecting the process of blurring, disruption and reconfiguration as shopping routes and practices changed. As the thesis will explore, reconfiguration could occur with large scale rebuilding programmes, such as that along Regent Street completed in the 1920s, the emergence of new consumer practices and identities, with the opening of a new store, or the arrival of a new collection, or simply during the course of the day.

These urban narratives positioned themselves as a required mediator between the city and its occupants. The guidebook, *The Magic of London* was explicit about its intentions, and in the section entitled ‘How to see London’ promised that if its method was followed, the reader would ‘at a glance get London into correct focus.’<sup>65</sup> [Figure 2.3] The narratives functioned as editors of a complex and fragmented area. For example, the map ‘London 1933 Principal Streets’ in *London What to See and Where to Stay* wrote out the tangle of streets.

The narratives also filtered and tamed the area through text. Guidebooks were explicit about their function as urban editor, *The Magic of London* presented its text as the answer to the questions: ‘How shall a stranger begin to know London? How shall he pick out the salient points in that mighty giant?’<sup>66</sup> Guides competed over the clarity of their filter, *The Magic of London* claiming ‘this handbook is designed on new lines. The average London guidebook confuses the stranger. It leaves him with no sense of direction.’<sup>67</sup> Here it is apparent that it was the urban viewing structure that was the commodity.

Another important aspect of the editing process, highlighted by geographical studies, is its manipulative potential. Cosgrove writes, ‘...all maps are thematic, selecting and highlighting

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<sup>64</sup> Lawrence E. Neal, *Retailing and the Public*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1932, 67.

<sup>65</sup> *The Magic of London: Guide to London and Round About*, Southern Railway of England and Great Western Railway of England, 1931, 13.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.



particular phenomena, consciously removing others, ignoring yet more, rendering some choices incapable of adoption by virtue about prior decisions about scale and frame. Such choices and the presences and absences they create are profoundly significant both in the making and meaning of maps.’<sup>68</sup> This is an important framework for considering the various guides and maps to 1930s London. It soon becomes apparent from a study of these navigational aids that there were a multitude of visible and unseen boundaries: that certain areas, consumers and kinds of consumption were deliberately excluded. It is this manipulation that created gender- and class-inscribed cities, reflecting characteristics of the consumer cultures that produced them.

The mythologising process is integral to narrating and imagining the city, highlighted by historians such as Nava, Nead and Walkowitz.<sup>69</sup> This work has concentrated on the urban mythologising within Victorian Britain, which created on one hand a story of modernity, and on the other that of sexual danger, and female exclusion. Nava writes, ‘The British version of this imagined geography tended to stress the disturbing aspects of the urban environment, the chaos and pollution, moral and sexual dissolution and the erosion of traditional order. In this narrative the threatening nature of the city regularly operated as a counterpoint to the ideal of a virtuous and harmonious rural or suburban domestic existence.’<sup>70</sup> Nead describes how this mythologising was a way of dealing with the city’s paradoxes, and was a key part of modern urban culture and experience. It is the purpose of this thesis to identify the myths of the 1930s West End, through a discussion of the spatiality, modernity and spectacular nature of its shopping cultures, and through the examination of its new consumer identities.

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<sup>68</sup> Cosgrove, *Mappings*, 11.

<sup>69</sup> Nava, ‘Modernity’s Disavowal’.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.



### 3.

## ‘THE FEMININE WORLD OF FASHION, FROM CHINA TO PERU, HAS HEARD OF BOND STREET.’ THE WEST END AS A HUB OF FASHIONABLE CONSUMPTION

Chapter 3 establishes that the West End was an important shopping location during the 1930s, and was constructed as a focal point for shopping cultures. Shopping that took place there was shown to be special and specific to that place, conferring value, status and meaning on both the activity and items bought; carefully constructed as an event, a source of pleasure, and a means of constructing a particular kind of consumer identity. The identification of a flourishing West End-centred quasi-luxury shopping culture, runs contrary to the current interest within consumption studies in everyday shopping practices.<sup>1</sup> It also challenges work which suggests that the rise of alternative shopping cultures associated with the suburban and provincial high street and the chain were diminishing the centralising pull of the West End within Britain’s shopping geography.<sup>2</sup> The chapter looks at places where the West End was constructed as special, and then examines its defining characteristics, particularly kineticism, ephemerality, fashionability and a specific set of spatial relationships.

Concepts of the specificity of the West End necessarily depend on it being constructed through its relationship with other places. Indeed, this chapter argues that West End is best understood

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<sup>1</sup> Miller et al., *Shopping, Place and Identity*, 6.

<sup>2</sup> Winship, ‘Culture of Restraint’.



in terms of its real and imagined spatial relationships. It was a hub within local, national and international networks, networks which allowed for differentiation within 1930s shopping cultures: the foreign, metropolitan, the suburban, and so on. The chapter particularly considers how networks were important in the ways the West End was navigated, narrated and imagined. A study of these different networks reveals a fluidity and complex layering of maps over the West End, which speak further of its identity in terms of gender, class, nationality and modernity.

### DEFINING THE WEST END: MAPS, ROUTES AND JOURNEYS

The West End was not easily defined through its physical boundaries, a characteristic which arises from its history. It variously encompassed and cut through several smaller districts within central London: Soho, Mayfair, St James, Kensington and so on. It was not an administrative area, in fact comprising parts of the London boroughs of Camden, Kensington and Chelsea, and Marylebone as well as Westminster. This muddle paralleled the extremely complex administration of London as a whole: the City governed itself, the London County Council's jurisdiction covered twenty-eight Metropolitan Boroughs, and Greater London encompassed both, in addition to parts of Surrey, Essex, Kent, and Hertfordshire. Further complicating the mix were the important landowners, such as the Crown and Cadogan Estates, who carved up much of the West End's territory between them, and whose power was significant. The regulation of the West End and the definition of its boundaries was, therefore, far from straightforward.

The West End existed most coherently and meaningfully not as a precise territory, but as an imagined or represented place. It was the area of London associated with entertainment, shopping and fashionable living. Its map was constructed most clearly in the urban commentaries of London guidebooks, newspapers and women's magazines. But its boundaries were drawn variously in each source. [Figure 3.1] *London for Everyman's* map of the West End stretched between Marble Arch to the west and Chancery Lane to the east, Euston Square to the north, Buckingham Palace and Waterloo to the south.<sup>3</sup> Others drew their boundaries more widely, or, through the text, constructed a territory from key clusters of activity, telescoping the distances between them, and filtering out elements that did not cohere. [Figure

<sup>3</sup> William Kent, *London for Everyman*, London: J. M. Dent, 1931, 24-5.



3.2] Hadlaw has written of Beck's 1933 London Underground map, 'its magic is such that it ... "consumed" the spatial relations which existed before its creation',<sup>4</sup> a notion which draws on Lefebvre's thesis about the cultural production of space.<sup>5</sup> This chapter argues that the text of urban narratives such as Thomas Cook's London guide equally constructed such a terrain,

Since the last century, the term 'West End' has been regarded as a symbol of all that is most elegant in the capital: Royal Parks and Palaces; the 'town houses' of Society; great hotels; animated streets lined with fashionable shops; theatres; art galleries, and museums. If it is in the city that money is made, it is in the 'West End' that it is spent.<sup>6</sup>

The slippery nature of the West End's definitions and boundaries might be assumed an impediment for an attempt to pin down the West End's nature. However the concepts of cities discussed in Chapter 2 which bring together the 'real' and 'unreal' show how this very elusion to be a key to uncovering the West End's nature. Understandings of the area drew on a mixture of cartographic, textual, experiential and mental maps. The location of its defining components and characteristics: Thomas Cook's 'great hotels' and 'streets lined with fashionable shops' became the most important reference points and landmarks with which to plot the map.

The West End was also spatially defined through its relationship with transport networks, which were closely connected to its retail function. These transport networks contributed to the conceptualisation of the West End in terms of networks and connections, in which the West End was a hub, and a place characterised by movement. London's mature transport infrastructure can be understood both in terms of facilitating journeys within the West End, and providing access to it from beyond.<sup>7</sup> In 1938, London Transport proudly boasted of its expanding and increasingly coordinated transport system: the tube network alone extended over thirty-eight miles, had nearly two hundred and fifty stations carried one and a half million passengers daily.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Janin Hadlaw, 'The London Underground Map: Imagining Modern Time and Space', *Design Issues*, Vol. 19, No.1, Winter 2003, 25.

<sup>5</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith, Oxford: Blackwell, 1991.

<sup>6</sup> *London: A Combined Guidebook and Atlas*, London: Thomas Cook and Son, 1937, 10.

<sup>7</sup> There is an established literature that addresses the development of modern transport systems. See for example, Alan A. Jackson, *Semidetached London: Suburban Development, life and Transport, 1900 – 1939*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1973.

<sup>8</sup> Advertisements for London Transport poster space, *Art and Industry*, March 1938, inside front cover and *Art and Industry*, April 1938, inside front cover.



The navigation of this complex, modern transport infrastructure was a popular topic for the proliferating London guidebooks,<sup>9</sup> which offered information on using it, and boasted of its modernity: relating its dimensions and listing the latest developments. It also becomes clear that routes, movement and nodes of connection were important in terms of the West End's identity as well as function.<sup>10</sup> One key inter-war transport project was the expansion and renovation of the Piccadilly Line, involving extending the line westwards and also the rebuilding of existing stations. This project implicitly promoted the role of the West End as a key focus for the transport network, with a well-publicised 'flag ship' station at Piccadilly Circus.<sup>11</sup> This was one of the West End's most important access points, at the heart of its principal shopping area, with 45,000 vehicles passing through daily, used by 25,000,000 passengers each year.<sup>12</sup> Whilst Hadlaw has argued that in the London Underground map, 'places ... exist purely in the context of their utility within the Underground system, as stations or interchanges',<sup>13</sup> this chapter argues that many of the station names immediately evoked the character of iconic West End places such as Piccadilly Circus, Oxford Circus and Bond Street, which is explored in further detail in Chapter 4.

The transport system shared with West End shopping cultures a self-conscious modernity. Rappaport has noted its significance in providing the ostensibly safe and convenient means for bringing large numbers of unaccompanied suburban Victorian and Edwardian women into centre, integral to the new consumer cultures. She shows that the system provided a nexus for the expression of anxiety connected with those modern cultures: namely the physical and moral dangers posed to women.<sup>14</sup> In the inter-war period, these transport networks continued to express the modernity of travel and urban access, suggesting that the West End was constructed for those that travelled to it. But this was expressed largely through a modernity of design and capacity, rather than transport technology or types of traveller. The West End's transport systems also revealed a particularly close relationship with consumer cultures, both through their design and the strategic location of routes and stations.

<sup>9</sup> For example the AA's guide to London outlined useful information on the variety of transport methods in and to/from London, and also provided statistics of numbers of passengers using various methods of transport in the central area. *The London Guide*, London: The Automobile Association, 1934, 29, 33.

<sup>10</sup> The impact of representations of the transport system on concepts of London at this time is examined in more detail in Hadlaw, 'The London Underground Map' and Pike, 'Modernist Space'.

<sup>11</sup> Reported in *Commercial Art*, February 1932 38-55.

<sup>12</sup> Statistics noted by Harold P. Clunn, *The Face of London: The Record of a Century's Changes and Development*, London: Simpkin Marshall, 1937, 161.

<sup>13</sup> Hadlaw, 'The London Underground Map', 33.

<sup>14</sup> Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*, Chapter 4.



[Figure 3.3] The modernity of the London Underground was notably expressed through Modern design under the stewardship of Frank Pick: in its advertising, graphic signage, vehicle design and the architecture of stations - the hubs of the network that linked rail to shopping street. This Modernism has been much discussed by transport and design historians and incorporated into the transport system’s own self-mythologising.<sup>15</sup> Piccadilly Circus Underground station, redesigned c. 1928 – 1930, was again important in this story. Its subterranean booking hall was designed by Adams, Holden and Pearson, using a Modern, or ‘moderne’, visual vocabulary of a kind which connected it with the fashionable shops and entertainment venues of the West End: smooth veneered surfaces, curved forms and the latest in atmospheric lighting. This stylistic link was strengthened by the strategic location of stations: at Piccadilly Circus display windows for the stores above were incorporated into the booking hall, and direct access was provided to Swan and Edgar’s lower levels.<sup>16</sup> Illustrations of the booking hall in the architectural press show it peopled by a fashionable, and predominantly female crowd; figures making their way between street and tube, and pausing to gaze at the department store displays.

The transport network was integrated as a site of consumption in other ways. [Figures 3.4 and 3.5] The tube, tramway and buses were indeed specifically advertised as gateways to the West End; by day for shopping, by night for entertainment. Typical examples include Underground posters ‘The West-End is Awakening’ of 1931 and ‘Design for Shopping’ of 1935, and also the ‘London’s Tramways for the West End’ advertising campaign of the early 1930s. [Figures 3.6 and 3.7] The surfaces of stations, tubes, trains and buses were also exploited as advertising sites. London Transport sought to tempt potential advertisers, ‘A million and a half people ride on the Underground daily... All of them want to buy something from *somebody*. Why not put a salesman – your poster – among the shoppers?’<sup>17</sup> The tube network was explicitly offered to businesses as ‘another shop window.’<sup>18</sup> Austin Reed was one important West End company which concentrated its advertising on the tube system, spearheading the use of consecutive posters along escalator walls to continuously engage the traveller’s eye.<sup>19</sup> *Vogue*’s shopping columnist commented on how transport advertising had become an integral and pleasurable

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<sup>15</sup> London Underground’s Modernism is discussed in Pike, ‘Modernist Space’ and Michael Saler, *The Avant-Garde in Inter-war England: Medieval Modernism and the London Underground*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. A broader context for this discussion of transport systems and design is provided in John Hewitt, ‘Posters of Distinction: Art, Advertising and the London, Midland, and Scottish Railways’, *Design Issues*, Vol.16, No. 1, Spring 2000, 16-35.

<sup>16</sup> Leach similarly describes the intense competition between store owners to control the show windows in American subway stations during the first quarter of the twentieth century. Leach, *Land of Desire*, 63.

<sup>17</sup> Advertisement for poster advertising space on the tube, *Art and Industry*, March 1938, inside front cover.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> *Art and Industry*, July 1939, 2-3, 10-11.



component of the shopping trip: ‘While some *Vogue* readers loll in Rolls-Royces, others batter their way through tubes and buses. But do not pity their struggles. They have compensation in plenty, for they can enjoy the brilliant posters which adorn the shiny tiled tunnels of the underground.’<sup>20</sup>

Routes and networks also infused the West End’s character through a heightened awareness of population flows. The burgeoning discipline of strategic urban planning, for example, wrote frequently of the decrease in central London’s residential populations.<sup>21</sup> The West End’s shopping crowds were largely formed of those who lived somewhere else; and it was therefore a place constructed in relation to ‘others’ rather than a local population, positioned in relation to other places. This was noted by the author of *Round and About London by Tram*, ‘The passenger traffic is tidal, flowing in the morning and ebbing at night. The centre of London is depopulating steadily whilst the suburbs, its dormitories, are filling.’<sup>22</sup> Suburban shoppers were certainly important in this West End story, but others were drawn there too, including the tourist and the provincial daytripper.<sup>23</sup>

This idea that the West End the territory of outsiders informed not only the ways it plugged into transport routes, but also the way it was conceptualised as ‘other’, ‘strange’ or simply as a destination. One discernable response to the ‘otherness’ of central London was that of ‘marvelling’, as expressed in *The Magic of London* of 1931,

The train spins smoothly over the points, and whether your terminus is Charing Cross, Victoria, Paddington, Waterloo or Holborn, you feel the spell of the greatest Metropolis of the world enthralling you every moment as you approach it. ... Already, perhaps, London has cast her spell over you. How vast she is; how enigmatic; how difficult to know; how fiercely life flows through the labyrinth of her ways; how exciting the smell of her; the steady throb of the abounding life in her as her million wheels go pounding past.<sup>24</sup>

Journeys figured prominently in consumers’ relationship with the West End. Motion has already been identified in Chapter 2 as a defining characteristic of modern, urban consumption

<sup>20</sup> ‘Shop-hound’, *Vogue*, 15 September 1937, 73.

<sup>21</sup> A series of London masterplans during the 1930s and 1940s reveal an awareness of this urban depopulation. See, for example, *Greater London Regional Planning Committee First Report*, December 1929; *Second Report of the Greater London Regional Planning Committee*, March 1933.

<sup>22</sup> *Round and About London by Tram: North of the Thames* c.1930.

<sup>23</sup> The pull of the West End for suburbanites in the Victorian and Edwardian periods is discussed in Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*.

<sup>24</sup> *The Magic of London: Guide to London and Round About*, The Southern Railway of England and Great Western Railway of England, 1931, 7.



cultures, embodied in the *flâneur* and window-shopper. Part I as whole argues that in inter-war London, the framework of the shopping trip was a particularly useful framework for expressing the connectedness of shopping, routes and journeys.

#### ‘THE INESTIMABLE BENEFITS OF A “WEST END HOUSE”’: THE LINCHPIN IN A NATIONAL NETWORK

It is becoming apparent that routes and networks were important in the articulation of the West End as special. This part of the chapter considers how the West End was positioned within metropolitan and national shopping networks. It looks at real and imagined spatial relationships with other places. More specifically, it considers how West End constructed its unique role through claims to exert a pull on consumers from different areas of Britain.

An understanding of the West End as an important shopping centre, and hub of shopping networks within London, depends on a reading of London as a loose association of different districts, differently assembled clusters of elements, in which the West End offered something particular. It was a reading of London that was prioritised by tourist guides, London newspapers, magazines and strategic plans, and so contributed in important ways to the imagining of the city. This understanding of London as a ‘patchwork’ was intimately related to the haphazard, piecemeal way in which central London developed. Resonances are also found with work on the contemporary city that understands the formation and function of urban districts in terms of ‘clusters’.<sup>25</sup> The concept calls for a sharpening of the spatial terminology used to describe the metropolitan consumption cultures discussed in this thesis. The West End was not important simply because the primary shops happened to be sited there. Rather, retailers and consumers flocked to the West End because of the importance of that place within consumer cultures. Thus, ‘West End’ might be a more useful, and accurate, category than ‘metropolitan’ with which to describe those cultures.

An analysis of the West End department stores’ relationship with these networks provides important evidence of how the area functioned relationally. The department store’s ability to allow the customer to purchase everything in one place was much trumpeted by store owners from the early days of the format. William Whiteley’s declaration that everything from a pin

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<sup>25</sup> See for example Graeme Evans, *Cultural Planning: An Urban Renaissance?* London: Routledge, 2001.



to an elephant could be purchased in his store has become an oft-quoted element of department store mythology. It is certainly true the large London department stores had a well-established, highly evolved retail system by 1930, which housed a large number of departments, which collectively offered an extensive range of commodities and services. It was still a thriving format, chosen by Simpson Ltd as the means to retail its menswear from 1936. The extensive clothing stock at the Simpson Piccadilly store ranged from full dress suits to sports wear, but the store went much further, addressing a whole breadth of masculine desires. The lower ground floor alone was designed to house a barber's shop, soda fountain, gun shop, shoe shop, chemists, florist, fishing shop, wine and spirit shop, luggage shop, snack bar, dog shop, sports shop, cigar and tobacconists, gift shop, saddlery shop, theatre agent, and travel agent.<sup>26</sup> During the opening months there was even an aviation department exhibiting full-sized aeroplanes. The store was clearly positioning itself as a masculine universal provider, aiming 'to bring together, into a beautiful and convenient setting, all the best things which are made for men.'<sup>27</sup> The department store system would potentially allow a single store to operate independently from its location, and also diminish the relevance of its proximity to other businesses in the shopping area.

[Figure 3.8] 'Dislocated' single store shopping practice in the Whiteley's tradition was promoted by stores in terms of coherence and convenience, as exemplified in Rose Taylor's 1937 advertisement. The practice was also sometimes recommended within women's magazine editorial as the solution to shopping stresses. *Vogue's* shopping columnist confided, 'There is something very soothing about department stores, something reassuring in the proximity of every comfort for body and soul'.<sup>28</sup>

[Figure 3.9] The single-store trip provided the structure for one genre of shopping article, couched precisely in these terms. For example, in '8-Hour Day in Town', *Vogue* advised:

At last you've booked your day - for a trip to town. You simply had to. You want a spring suit. Your skin looks alarmingly post-winter. It's Leslie's birthday in a week. Emma is murmuring about the glass cloths. The sun parlour wants redecorating. Your husband's pullovers are a sight. Old Crabtree says don't blame *him* if you have no cut flowers from the garden this summer. 'A day!' you think, 'I need a month. It'll take me half a day just travelling from one place to another, from dress shop to beauty salon, on to a toy shop, a decorator's, a man's shop, a seedsman's and so on.' Yes, but need you? Probably

<sup>26</sup> Letter from Alexander Simpson to Joseph Emberton, 2 September 1935, Simpsons Archive.

<sup>27</sup> *Evening Gazette*, 30 April 1936.

<sup>28</sup> 'Shop-hound', *Vogue*, 28 October 1936, 96



you've no idea of the versatility of the modern 'department store' where you can cash cheques, have beauty treatments, chose from the latest Paris models, attend an auction, watch a television programme, read and write letters, buy anything on earth from a candle to a cockatoo.<sup>29</sup>

*Vogue* goes on to report how two women were packed off to do this, one at Harrods, one at Selfridges. This was a discourse that spoke of the anxiety of negotiating shopping routes to the extent that journeys *within* a store might also prove excessively fatiguing. One *Vogue* shopping column reported a new service:

If you have been discouraged from store shopping because of the multitude of the departments and the time taken journeying up and down the floors in search of accessories, know that your troubles are over. Mrs Ralph Lambton has come to Peter Jones. She has simply made a big fitting room into a sanctum where you can discuss what you want and have everything assembled before your eyes in one quiet and comfortable corner.<sup>30</sup>

'Universal providing' has been singled out by as a defining feature of the new Victorian department store. This thesis argues that too much weight has been ascribed to this kind of shopping narrative. Historians have been captivated by the idea of the store as panacea to consumer desire, and have failed to sufficiently interrogate the claims of department store owners and the conventions of magazine journalism.<sup>31</sup> There has been an assumption that convenience was not only desirable, but was a shopping priority. Whilst this might have been true for the kind of every-day provisioning which has been the subject of many retail studies, particularly of those on the post-war period, it fundamentally misunderstands the nature of West End shopping cultures, and fails to apply the important theories about spatiality and connections that have also been developed within the discipline.

If stores *were* predominantly working independently, than West End stores might still be assumed to have differed from their suburban and provincial counterparts in terms of scale, lavishness of design, range of goods, fame and metropolitan cachet, though little benefit would be attributed to a location on a prime West End shopping street. That is to say, there was potentially little distinction between a store positioned on the Farringdon Road, a mews in Marylebone or Oxford Street. For 1930s retailers, this was patently not the case, as they clustered along very specific, and largely West End, streets

<sup>29</sup> '8-Hour Day in Town', *Vogue*, 16 March 1938, 92-3.

<sup>30</sup> 'Shop-hound', *Vogue*, 26 November 1936, 106.

<sup>31</sup> For example, Bowlby notes this was an attribute of both department stores and supermarkets, without further considering what role this shared characteristic might have in giving them the iconic status she ascribes. Bowlby, *Carried Away*, 8.



A detailed study of the 1930s West End indicates that the single department store shopping trip was largely an editorial conceit and a department store advertising strategy, as the shopping trip was neither easily nor desirably contained within one site. The overwhelmingly dominant message of London tourist guides, local newspapers such as the *Evening Standard*, and a fashionable women’s magazine like *Vogue*, was that not only was the West End the location of London’s most important shops, but that this place had a particular meaning within metropolitan cultures. Whilst one shopper *might* shop exclusively at Peter Jones, another might do so at Harrods, Dickens and Jones and several little shops in Bond Street, a third at a myriad of different stores. It is the contention of this chapter that it was in this variety and multiplicity that the value of the West End lay: in the pleasurable practices of browsing and choosing through which shopping cultures were examined and identity constructed.

Several factors point to the fact that stores considered a West End address as an asset. They advertised extensively in *Vogue*, and thus positioned themselves within the collective of shops comprising the magazine’s urban narrative. In the real West End, the fact the businesses specialising in suits, jewellery, serving food and so on found it worthwhile to position themselves in the same streets as the department store further suggested that shopping cultures required a variety of venues, commodities and services. This was in accordance with the advice of retail design experts, the Westwoods who advised in their important book *Smaller Retail Shops*: ‘General proximity to other shops of the same trade, or same degree of luxury in special trades, is an advantage because it creates a centre for the particular trade, or a place where a particular type of person shops.’<sup>32</sup> The stores’ deliberate exploitation of connections with the street was also evidenced in their design, their window displays and other use of spectacle, as later chapters will explore. They were keen to promote themselves in this shared West End context, forming organisations such as the Regent Street Association.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, as Part I explores, the fact that location was so very crucial for a shop meant that the shopping trip could not be ‘dislocated’ in a real sense, whether or not it took place within a single store.

Having established the usefulness of a West End address, it is important to consider how West End retail related to a national network of consumers. A case study of *Vogue* is used to make a case for the West End’s importance in a title addressing a national readership. This study is

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<sup>32</sup> Bryan and Norman Westwood, *Smaller Retail Shops*, London: The Architectural Press, 1937, 15.

<sup>33</sup> The Regent Street Association is discussed in Erika Rappaport, ‘Art, Commerce, or Empire? The Rebuilding of Regent Street, 1880-1927’, *History Workshop Journal*, 2002, issue 53, 110-11.



contextualised through the stores' relationship with these networks and the representation of shopping geographies in other women's magazines to uncover the class-inflected nature of this network. This section is an examination of London as a focal point for national life, which is strongly suggested by tourist guides. Thomas Cook's guidebook to London, for example, termed it 'the seat of Government of Great Britain and the heart of the British Empire.'<sup>34</sup> It suggests that a centralised network of fashionable shopping was a significant element in London's role. As Laurence Neal wrote: 'In the case of the [provincial visitor], the names of the leading stores are ... such household words that it is remarkable how frequently they are one of the first places to be visited.'<sup>35</sup>

Geography is an important context for the discussion of fashion and consumption in the images and text of *Vogue*. Despite the national, and indeed significant expatriate, market for British *Vogue*, the dominant ideal of femininity within the magazine was clearly metropolitan, and the associated models of consumption were highly fashionable, expensive and West End-based.<sup>36</sup> *Vogue*'s message was furthermore very clear that the precise location of shopping took place was as important as what was bought, because the item's meaning was coloured by the location of purchase. The affluent world found on the pages of the magazine had however a more complex national and international geography of fashionable living; of which its shopping geography was only one part.<sup>37</sup> One *Vogue* article went so far as to claim, 'London, except for three months of the year, is a tiresome necessity to the English. The real social life still gathers round the great country-houses; it is week-ends that are remembered and talked of for months afterwards...'.<sup>38</sup> *The London Way* described *Vogue*'s fashion cultures:

The London designers make clothes for real women; for women who live in the country, drive cars, go shopping, lunch out, sit on committees, drop in for drinks, go to Ascot, give parties, holiday abroad. Every model they design is meant to be worn on some typical occasion – not merely to demonstrate a fashion point, as so often in Paris.<sup>39</sup>

It is clear that *Vogue* fashion was bound together with the social calendar with its broader national and international geographies, but that clothes were still infused with the 'London

<sup>34</sup> *London: A Combined Guidebook and Atlas*, London: Thomas Cook and Son, 1937, 9.

<sup>35</sup> Lawrence E. Neal, *Retailing and the Public*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1932, 17.

<sup>36</sup> This ideal of metropolitan femininity within a nationally-circulating magazine drew heavily on the model established in elite Victorian and Edwardian magazines, discussed by Beetham, *A Magazine of her own?*, 7.

<sup>37</sup> This scene is usefully summarised in Josephine Ross, *Society in Vogue*, London: Condé Nast, 1992.

<sup>38</sup> *Vogue*, 5 January 1938, 17.

<sup>39</sup> 'The London Way', *Vogue*, March 1950, 77. Although written in 1950, this article echoes the 'London' identity of the British designers featured in *Vogue* in the 1930s.



Way'. This has parallels with Gilbert's argument about the continued role of the modern city within the supposedly internationally homogenised late twentieth fashion landscape linked to the globalisation of financial and cultural systems.<sup>40</sup> [Figure 3.10] For 1930s *Vogue*, the West End was the specified place for shopping, a place where a woman was kitted out for the broader territory of her fashionable lifestyle so that, as a Vauxhall car advertisement in *Vogue* suggested: 'on the quaintest country lane or in fashionable Bond Street, she will never feel out of place'.<sup>41</sup>

The magazine thus constituted a guide for the West End, but was also a manual for metropolitan shopping identities. For example, fashion features regularly recommended outfits sourced from the West End for wearing on shopping trips, so that place was at once the designation of the trip and literally cloaked the consumer. For instance, an article, 'For Town', included garments from Digby Morton, Palace Gate; Miss Ware, Bond Street; Asprey, Bond Street and Fortnum and Mason in Piccadilly.<sup>42</sup>

The story of twentieth-century advertising has been told in terms of brands, and therefore dislocated representations of commodities. However, advertising in *Vogue* definitely located consumption within the West End. The magazine *did* reflect a trend towards national brands within British shopping habits: many of the goods advertised in *Vogue* were nationally available and fashion features were sometimes appended by lists of garment stockists based all across the country for the benefit of its national readership. But it is apparent that the capital still had a focal pull within this network. Indeed, the ageographical nature of brand advertising has been overplayed in existing studies: chain stores and brands were both often firmly located within 1930s advertisements through the prominent provision of a street address.

The West End nature of *Vogue*'s shopping geography could be straightforwardly ascribed to the fact that its advertisers were predominantly West End shops, department stores, or designers with a West End address. By the 1930s, advertisers had well-established leverage within the world of women's magazines, accounting for a significant proportion of a magazine's contents. Leiss, Klein and Jhally have shown the huge expansion in print media such as women's magazines from the late nineteenth century was built substantially on

<sup>40</sup> David Gilbert, 'Urban Outfitting: the City and the Spaces of Fashion Culture', Bruzzi, Stella, and Church Gibson, Pamela (eds.), *Fashion Cultures: Theories, Explorations and Analysis*, London: Routledge, 2000.

<sup>41</sup> Advertisement for Vauxhall Cars, *Vogue*, June 8, 1938.

<sup>42</sup> *Vogue*, 20 March 1935, 69.



advertising revenue, and it continued to provide the financial backbone in the 1930s.<sup>43</sup> This could potentially have given them the power to dictating the magazine's geography.

During the 1930s, the boundaries between the voice of the internal editorial departments and substantial external advertising material were certainly collapsed in terms of approach, text and visual style, lending the powerful advertisers the authority of the editorial voice. Shopping columns and features on trips to town certainly read like advertorials, and have been interpreted by historians including Scanlon and Rappaport as such.<sup>44</sup> According to Scanlon,

Advertisers lured women into the world of consumption, and the Journal facilitated this cultural process. It did so by providing not simply a series of advertisements but instead an appealing combination of advertisements, advice, and fiction - a winning combination of features that worked together both to further promote consumer roles for women in the modern world and to ensure that women's ability to consume, rather than any other similarities or differences among women, would define their lives.<sup>45</sup>

Magazine editorial proved good advertising for a store. For example, following a 1930 feature on a wardrobe compiled from John Lewis, *Vogue* reported that the Oxford Street shop displayed all the mentioned items in their window displays, suggesting a large measure of collusion between store and magazine.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, advertisements sometimes adopted the guise of editorial, seen in an advertisement for Rayon in American *Vogue*, which appeared at first glance to be a shopping article entitled, 'Spring in the New York shops.'<sup>47</sup>

There is an argument that it was the magazine's construction of femininity through the consumption of commodities that resulted from and promoted advertisers' power. Beetham has written, 'Femininity in the 1890s magazines appeared both in the body constructed through the purchase of certain commodities – the dress, the hair-piece, the ointment – and in the domestic scene ... which depended on skilful shopping for and deployment of commodities. There was, therefore, a dynamic relationship between this re-making of femininity and the material basis of the magazines in advertising revenue.'<sup>48</sup>

<sup>43</sup> William Leiss, Stephen Kline and Sut Jhally, *Social Communication in Advertising: Persons, Products and Images of Well-Being*, London: Methuen, 1986, Chapter 5.

<sup>44</sup> Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*, 127.

<sup>45</sup> Jennifer Scanlon, *Inarticulate Longings: The Ladies' Home Journal, Gender and the promises of Consumer Culture*, New York and London: Routledge, 1995, 47.

<sup>46</sup> 'A Wardrobe From Under One Roof' *Vogue*, 19 February 1930, 66-7.

<sup>47</sup> *Vogue* (New York), 12 April 1930, 12.

<sup>48</sup> Margaret Beetham, *A Magazine of her own? Domesticity and Desire in the Woman's Magazine 1800 - 1914*, London: Routledge, 1996, 8.



However, the success with which magazines attracted advertising revenue can also be read as a testament to these advertisers' belief in women's power as consumers, as suggested by Scanlon.<sup>49</sup> Advertisements clearly indicated that women had responsibility for the consumption not just of fashion and domestic items, but also for things such as cars and petrol, which were extensively advertised within women's magazines in this period.<sup>50</sup> It is suggested that a reading of the West End map as advertiser-prescribed overly privileges the power of advertisers and indeed editorial to dictate its geography. There were other actors at play within consumer cultures, not least the consumers and the cultures of city itself. The relationship between editorial and advertisers might be better seen as symbiotic: the importance of the West End as a fashion and shopping centre for the target audience of *Vogue* needed to be meaningful for readers, just as Hadlaw insisted upon the recognisability of the underground map. Gilbert has made a similar argument about the urban branding of late twentieth-century fashion goods, 'the continued cachet of the name 'Paris' depends not just on the sustained intensity of the virtual city of promotional campaigns and the fashion press, but also on the credibility of the city as a centre of fashion and consumption and particularly as an embodies experience of fashion.'<sup>51</sup> Consumption practices and their textual representations were mutually constitutive. 1930s advertisers and editors could boast that the area housed the country's most luxurious shops, largest and most famous department stores, the largest number and variety of businesses, and the aforementioned variety of services and entertainments. But it also provided the shopper with an experience that was greater than the sum of its parts, and that was not under the control of individual advertisers.

In line with the discussion of routes and networks in the previous section, narratives of London within *Vogue* often constructed the city for outsiders; as the destination of an expedition. The 'trip' was a particularly important mechanism with which the magazine discussed shopping, and constructed its shopping geographies. This trip was shown to involve a sense of occasion, whether the shopper travelled the short distance from Hampstead for an afternoon, from suburban Surbiton for a day, or from Yorkshire for a precious week. Indeed such explicit distinctions between categories of reader were often collapsed by the magazine, all ascribed the same adhesion to metropolitan cultures. This reflected a deliberate attempt to broaden the appeal of the magazine's contents, but also provided a comment on the London-centric nature of the cultures of England's social elite.

<sup>49</sup> Scanlon, *Inarticulate Longings*, Chapter 6.

<sup>50</sup> See for example, advert 'Ladies prefer shell' in *Vogue*, 5 March 1930, 85.

<sup>51</sup> Gilbert, 'Urban Outfitting', 9.



However, the seduction by London of strangers suggested by the previously quoted passage from *London the Wonder City* did not capture the essence of *Vogue*'s depiction of London: Paris or Rome might be featured as tourist cities where the reader could meander, marvelling at the curiousness of the city. But London was where the *Vogue* reader was meant to be her 'home' turf, a habitué, even if she did not actually live there. Neither was she represented as a *flâneuse*, her senses over-stimulated by the exhibition of London streets: her visit was altogether more purposeful, if still pleasurable. It would seem that whilst women illustrated in *Vogue* were often experienced urbanites, the text acknowledged an additional readership of partial 'strangers' to the city who didn't want to appear as such. Advice columns and articles thus recurrently presented the West End as the destination of a journey, or 'expedition'.<sup>52</sup> One article advised:

We can't advise you too strongly to plan your day several days ahead ... with as much care and cunning as if it were a trip to the tropics. List what you want to buy. If you are shopping for your family and house, make a note of all the necessary data. (Your husband's collar size, your children's measurements, the area of the lawn.) Collect swatches of all your existing clothes, so that the things you buy will fit into your colour schemes.<sup>53</sup>

The magazine clearly styled itself as the source of urban knowledge to enable a confident and nonchalant navigation of the West End's shopping streets without rhapsodising inappropriately about its wonders. The role of expert knowledges within magazines' constructions of modern urban identities is explored further in Part IV.

The positioning of the West End's shopping streets at the centre of a national network worked on many levels. For example, the area's principal shopping arteries were transformed from time to time into important parade routes, taking on a spectacular role explored further in Chapter 11. This national function was particularly prominent in this period due to the occurrence of key state occasions. In the summer of 1935, King George V and Queen Mary carried out a series of processions to celebrate their Jubilee, several of which incorporated key shopping streets.<sup>54</sup> [Figure 3.11] Similarly, in 1937 the new king's short coronation procession included Piccadilly, Regent Street and Oxford Street, going past the West End's most

<sup>52</sup> This term is used, for example, in 'Labour saving shopping for the woman up in town', *Vogue*, 23 August 1939.

<sup>53</sup> *Vogue*, 16 March 1938, 92.

<sup>54</sup> These routes are mapped out in *Geographia Pictorial Plan and Guide to London: Showing Routes of Processions and Suburban Drives of Their Majesties King George V and Queen Mary, May 6th - June 8th, 1935*, London: Geographia, 1935.



important stores.<sup>55</sup> There was also a more popular tradition of claiming West End streets for celebration, evidenced in the World War Two victory parades. This places the West End's shopping streets at the centre of national pageantry, and suggests their multiple identity. At times the primacy of particular functions would be the source of controversy, brought to a head with the Crown's plans to stress the national and civic rather than commercial function, rebuilding Regent Street as an imperial parade route.<sup>56</sup> For the most part during the 1930s streets performed the dual role of shopping thoroughfare and parade route unproblematically. [Figure 3.12] When the new D. H. Evans shop opened in Oxford Street in the coronation year, it exploited this connection within its advertising: it produced an inaugural coronation commemoration brochure, including a coronation parade map, whilst the aerial photography of the front cover ascribed the store a prominent place within West End life in this important year. As Chapter 11 discusses, the stores lining the routes seized the opportunity to join in with the celebrations through spectacular practices.

The remainder of this section considers *Vogue's* picture of a shopping network with a centralised, London-based pull, alongside different shopping geographies, such as those associated with the chain store and those constructed with magazines which were differently class positioned. For example, J. B. Priestley's oft-quoted passage described a down-market consumer culture located on the by-passes and arterial roads leading into London, 'filling stations and factories that look like exhibition buildings, of giant cinemas and dance halls and cafés, bungalows with tiny garages, cocktail bars, Woolworth's, motor coaches, wireless, hiking, factory girls looking like actresses, greyhound racing and dirt tracks, swimming pools, and everything given away for cigarette coupons.'<sup>57</sup> National clothing chains such as Marks and Spencer, Dolcis and Austin Reed flourished during the inter-war period, and constituted another kind of shopping network; linking suburban and provincial high streets into a nationwide web. The growth of these retail outlets was considerable: the records of Marks and Spencer reveal that 167 new stores opened during the 1930s, compared to 23 in the 1910s and 27 in the 1920s.<sup>58</sup> Winship makes a case that chains were the dominant retail format during the inter-war years,<sup>59</sup> however this thesis suggests that the vibrant consumer culture of the 1930s was broad enough in demography to encompass cultures associated with the suburban and provincial high street *and* those with the more affluent and fashionable West End; and

<sup>55</sup> *How to See London: Coronation Edition*, 1937, back cover.

<sup>56</sup> Hobhouse, *A History of Regent Street*; Rappaport, 'Art, Commerce, or Empire?'.  
<sup>57</sup> J. B. Priestley, *English Journey*, London: Heinemann, 1934, 401.

<sup>58</sup> Statistics from the Marks and Spencer Archive.

<sup>59</sup> Winship, 'Culture of Restraint'.



furthermore that in several respects these shopping cultures might not be so diametrically opposed as they might seem from their geographies.

Winship's argument is that British chain stores were so successful because their retail methods were characterised by a 'culture of restraint', more in accordance with lower-middle-class culture in the period than the excess and pleasurable indulgence historically associated with West End stores. However, not all chains were directed to the lower-middle-class end of the market, Austin Reed being an important case in point. This study also argues that Winship overstates the predominance of 'restraint' and functionality in 1930s shopping cultures, even within the lower-middle-class band, and that retail and shopping cultures associated with pleasure, luxury and, specifically, the place of the West End still had a powerful 'aspirational' pull for those ostensibly excluded by the geography, prices, and 'exclusive' atmosphere associated with this location.

More problematic for the central thread of this thesis is Winship's suggested equation of expanding chains with increasingly dislocated consumer cultures; the story of the rise of the 'brand'. Her argument *is* fundamentally about routes, but focuses on the speeded up movement of goods to retail outlets resulting from increased national circulation, rather than the movement of consumers, or their mental positioning within a national shopping geography. She suggests that within such a system, the goods were divested of the department store 'aura' which as Williams and Leach have shown was associated with them during the Victorian and Edwardian periods,<sup>60</sup> and that they therefore no longer drew their importance from their shop environment. Winship writes, ' "widened, scythed through" encapsulates the undercutting of place by market and the changing landscape of chain stores (chain cinemas, chain pubs, chain teashops) which dramatically pushed their way into British high streets in the 1930s.'<sup>61</sup> In contrast, this research about the West End reveals the continued centrality of geography in the meaning of retailing, shopping practices, and commodities, urging a reassessment of the role of chain store shopping. Winship *does* acknowledge that the identity of British chain stores, unlike their American counterparts, was not synonymous with, or completely dominated by, the brand identity of the goods they sold.

This study extends this arguments enabling a reconciliation of the two case studies; showing that geographical location was central to the identities of the West End store, the provincial

<sup>60</sup> Leach, *Land of Desire*; Williams, *Dream Worlds*.

<sup>61</sup> Winship, 'Culture of Restraint', 18.



chain store and the goods they sold, and that they were both positioned within the fluid and shifting real and imagined networks of 1930s shopping cultures. It is material that the intense interest in store positioning on the part of West End store owners and designers drew directly on the new imported methods of American chains, also influential amongst British provincial chain stores and other retailers. For example, Bryan and Norman Westwood wrote, ‘Correct siting is one of the most important factors determining the success or otherwise of shops. The conspicuously successful “chain shop” firms of to-day owe at least part of their prosperity to their research departments, whose job it is to analyse the prospects of any proposed new shop ...’<sup>62</sup> This interest in sites; in position within the street, relationships to side streets, parking, aspect and most importantly the colonisation of the high street was fundamentally about place. It was also about the specificity of location: individual high streets had locally meaningful identities, which many architectural commentators and groups such as the CPRE argued could not, or should not, be immediately overridden by the arrival of a chain.

Another important point to make is that chain store networks were often anchored in the West End with a flagship store. This store was differentiated from others in the network by its use as, or proximity to, the company’s administrative headquarters, and lavished with extra resources, design, architecture, staffing, stock and so on. For instance, Marks and Spencer’s massive expansion of the 1930s included two significant Oxford Street shops: the Marble Arch store of 1930 and The Pantheon of 1938. It is clear from company records that both held particularly important positions within the company’s portfolio.<sup>63</sup> Similarly, in 1939, Austin Reed had a total of twenty-seven shops across England, two in Scotland and one in Northern Ireland.<sup>64</sup> [Figure 3.13] Although advertising campaigns were supposed to be localised to each store,<sup>65</sup> in fact, national and international advertising campaigns identified the company as ‘Austin Reed of Regent Street’, identifying this as the store that flavoured the whole chain. It is also clear that this chain promoted itself through distinctively metropolitan masculine identities, which tied into the location of this branch, a subject explored further in Part IV. Through the centralisation of these networks into radials from a London base, chains in local high streets could be infused with a certain measure of West End shopping cultures. This

<sup>62</sup> Bryan and Norman Westwood, *Smaller Retail Shops*, London: The Architectural Press, 1937, 13. A similar point is made by Hammond, who noted the awareness of site within the multiple trade, and the professionalisation of the choosing of site. A. Edward Hammond, *Multiple Shop Organisation*, London: Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons, 1930, Chapter 4 and Appendix 1.

<sup>63</sup> For example, Bookbinder notes that the Marble Arch Marks and Spencer shop had the best stock and staff, as it was the store most frequently visited by Simon Marks. Paul Bookbinder, *Simon Marks; Retail Revolutionary*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1993, 102-3.

<sup>64</sup> *Art and Industry*, July 1939, 13.

<sup>65</sup> ‘There is no attempt to advertise Austin Reed to the provinces as ‘a London shop’; reckoning with the civic pride of the provincial cities, it is considered that this would create unfavourable prejudice.’ *Art and Industry*, July 1939, 1



argument about the continued importance of specific urban sites within national chains echoes Gilbert's work on the relationship between the global and the urban within late twentieth-century fashion cultures. He writes, 'While developments such as out-of-town shopping and e-commerce seem to presage the homogenisation and de-urbanisation of consumption, there are aspects of fashion culture which actively encourage production of active and differentiated urban spaces.'<sup>66</sup>

[Figures 3.14 and 3.15] This metropolitan magnetism was exploited by the big West End stores, using the common devices of mail order shopping and delivery systems to bring a piece of the West End to suburban and provincial locations, and to compete with chains. This was also explicitly evidenced by Simpson Piccadilly, which operated alongside a pre-existing national network of small retailers of Simpson Ltd clothes. These agents were tied to the West End store not only through the garments, but through the graphic signage and window displays. The management of Simpson Piccadilly reassured the agents in 1935 through describing how these places would related to each other: "Simpson, Piccadilly" becomes for you – your London shop. While your own personal business remains individual and untouched in its traditional character – you share with Simpsons the inestimable benefits of a "West End house" ', benefits which included access to its stock, use as a showroom, advice and training, and display templates.<sup>67</sup> The West End anchor was explicitly sold to agents as a means of competing with chains: 'In nearly every sphere of retail today, the multiple store – heavily financed and heavily advertised – is spreading its tentacles throughout the country ... Against the superior financial and advertising strength of the multiple business, Simpsons are going to erect a strong nation-wide bulwark for you and all our agents – the keystone of which will be "Simpson, Piccadilly".'<sup>68</sup> This thesis's exploration of the special nature of the West End is not incompatible with a version of retail history which highlights the rise of the chain store, but suggests a more complicated inter-war shopping landscape, and warns against the too hasty disposal of 'place' as a means of understanding it. The history of the chain is, after all, necessarily also the history of place: of the suburban and provincial high street.

*Vogue's* exclusive concern with elite, metropolitan shopping cultures was not mirrored in the popular press as a whole. This study reveals the role of class in the construction of shopping networks and their relationship with the West End, suggesting that shopping maps could bar as

<sup>66</sup> Gilbert, 'Urban Outfitting', 8.

<sup>67</sup> Memorandum issued to small retailers of Simpson Ltd clothes nationwide, c. 1935. Simpsons Archive.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.



well as facilitating access to a city. In *Home Chat* and *Woman*, two magazines aimed at lower-middle and working-class women, the West End was ostensibly absent as a shopping location. The inferred rejection of metropolitan consumption by the domestically orientated *Home Chat* is perhaps not surprising. However *Woman*, launched in 1937, sought to represent a younger, more modern version of womanhood. In addition to housewives, it addressed working women, often depicted as secretaries and sales assistants.<sup>69</sup> This group, positioned by historians such as Alexander at the very heart of the thriving inter-war consumer society, enjoyed increased levels of disposable income, ripe for expenditure on cheap ready-to-wear dresses, which drew on Hollywood-inspired models of fashionability.<sup>70</sup> However, whereas in *Vogue* femininity was largely constructed through the consumption of fashion, in *Home Chat* and *Woman* it was done primarily through women's domestic role, whether or not this role was juggled with waged work.

It would appear that the consumers represented in *Home Chat* and *Woman* did not simply *prefer* to shop locally: they actually felt excluded from the fashionable West End shopping map. This experience of ostracism was articulated through comments about provincial isolation and insufficient income. A typical correspondent complained, 'I live in the country and the nearest town doesn't possess any very smart women's shops so that when I see exciting frocks and accessories in *Woman* I long to send for them...'<sup>71</sup> Another wrote, 'Alas a modest country bumpkin, I rarely visit London, I find it simply eats up money.'<sup>72</sup> Whilst the doors of the famous West End stores were theoretically open to anyone, not all women felt in a position to take up the invitation.

This chapter has so far established that the magazine was a primary place where different shopping geographies were constructed. It has, however, contextualised *Vogue*'s London-weighted shopping network with a more fluid picture of the West End's positioning within a national shopping network, in which class was an important factor. *Vogue*'s West End shopping content constituted one version of the role of the capital within consumer culture; it provided an imagined map, encoded with messages about the exclusivity of this geography.

<sup>69</sup> 'Women must work', *Woman* 12 June 1937, 10-11.

<sup>70</sup> Alexander, 'Becoming a Woman'.

<sup>71</sup> *Woman*, 22 July 1939, 4.

<sup>72</sup> *Woman*, 23 September 1939, 4.



## ‘COME TO BRITAIN!’ THE WEST END AND INTERNATIONAL SHOPPING NETWORKS

1930s narratives of the West End found within tourist guides, *Vogue* magazine, store and product advertising represented London as a world city. They constructed a map of consumption which extended way beyond the boundaries of the British Isles, in which routes projected into the West End from far-flung corners of the globe. [Figure 3.16] This was certainly a representation facilitated by the growth of the international travel industry and networks, and was inscribed on the wall of Piccadilly Circus underground station in the form of a mural. This part of the chapter focuses on the *meaning* of this positioning. It draws on work within historical geography that has argued for the necessity of addressing international relationships within concepts of Britishness.<sup>73</sup> [Figure 3.17] It takes account of how the West End was positioned as an important hub within another international network that existed alongside, and intersected with, still potent concepts of Empire, and also the fraught international political relations which formed the content of 1930s news bulletins. It was a predominantly feminine network of fashionable living, couture, consumption, expatriatism and tourism. It then highlights the Britishness of this map by placing it alongside the equivalent international networks sketched out in American and French editions of *Vogue*. This reveals the specificity of the conceptualisation of shopping networks described within this chapter to a particular national audience, and, connectedly, to the Britishness of West End shopping cultures. This section draws attention to the way spatial understandings of shopping cultures were predicated on nationally-inflected imagined world networks. The different accounts of the West End’s place within this shopping world hold in common a positioning of 1930s fashionable consumption cultures on an international arena.

As previously described, *Vogue*’s fashionable social whirl was lived out on an international stage, of which a shopping geography was one part, but a pivotal one. In this context, the West End was portrayed as a store cupboard to provide the goods to equip people for international living. In addition to *Vogue*’s British-based social calendar, *Vogue* also painted an atlas of travel destinations. For instance, one issue of *Vogue* contained articles entitled: ‘Fashions from the Riviera’, ‘Cruising: what clothes to take’, ‘When you go to Egypt’, ‘Pleasures of India’,

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<sup>73</sup> See for example Felix Driver and David Gilbert (eds). *Imperial Cities: Landscape, Display and Identity*, Manchester, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999; Gilbert, ‘London in all its Glory’; Gilbert et al., *Geographies of British Modernity*.



‘The school of skiing’, and ‘Golf in Southern France.’<sup>74</sup> All of these environments required a dedicated wardrobe, and *Vogue* structured its fashion features so as to provide them.

[Figure 3.18] Yardley frequently promoted the West End as internationally important due to a potent connection of goods and place. It advertised it in these terms to the readers of British, American and French editions of *Vogue*. It sold its products to a British audience with the phrase, ‘Complexion born in Bond Street, now known around the world’.<sup>75</sup> Similarly it advertised the ‘English Lavender’ range in American *Vogue* with a letter purportedly from an English man in Calcutta, who described his wife, ‘each morning when she starts off from the terrace, her obviously West End tussor, her sure horsemanship ... and most of all her fresh, clear complexion make you know that a real bit of England is driving through the compound.’<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, West End shopping was presented by Yardley as a means of reconciling the demands of operating within complex national and international circuits, ‘Into London these days come flocking hundreds of lovely, sun-saturated women from their holiday hideaways bent upon turning themselves immediately from careless summer beauties into creatures of radiant, formal loveliness ... hurrying to one famous House in Bond Street as first step in the transformation.’<sup>77</sup>

[Figure 3.19] However, this West End shopping focus must be placed within the context of the broader consumption of fashion. *Vogue* pictured networks of fashionability, in which Paris and London were the key venues in articles such as ‘*Vogue*’s eye view of the mode: forging the links between London and Paris’.<sup>78</sup> This preoccupation with the Parisian followed a tradition within British feminine fashion, mediated through women’s magazines. This continued approach was exemplified in the article ‘How they brought the good news from Paris to London’, which described the process of dissemination of Paris fashions to the British magazine-reading market and their modification for that audience:

Our fashion editors have been in Paris since the Openings began, but then, theirs is no simple, straightforward task of mere reporting. From hundreds of new styles *Vogue* sets out to separate the successes from the sensation ... And this goes on till the very last ‘plane has rushed the last scrap of information to *Vogue*’s London office, in the nick of time for the Paris Fashions issue. But since

<sup>74</sup> *Vogue* January 1930. *Vogue*’s international life is usefully described in Ross, *Society in Vogue*.

<sup>75</sup> Advertisement for Yardley in *Vogue* 16 September 1936, 1.

<sup>76</sup> *Vogue* (New York), 12 April 1930, 135.

<sup>77</sup> *Vogue*, 16 September 1936, 1.

<sup>78</sup> *Vogue*, 18 September 1935.



nowadays London itself is so important – even at Paris Collections time! – *Vogue* plans to show, too, pages of fashion from our own famous houses....<sup>79</sup>

By setting up this binary fashion system, British *Vogue* turned its back on the rise in importance of the United States as a fashion influence, noted in other commentaries.<sup>80</sup>

This cosmopolitan map of fashion references clearly had an important impact on the meaning of fashionable dress for ordinary women who could not afford to jet between cities.<sup>81</sup> Fashion coverage was imbued with concepts of place, in the sense that the 'British' or the 'Parisian' were important terms in the analysis of clothing and the associated fashion industries. However, these fashion networks did not straightforwardly replicate shopping networks, for although the acquisition of clothing was implicit in these articles, they primarily presented an imagined geography of fashion references, of high fashion culture, rather than representing the geographies associated with practices of shopping. Furthermore, the intimate relationship with the streets of a city that a constructed shopping trip entailed was usually lacking.

This image of the West End extending tendrils of influence across the globe was clearly attractive for a British audience, and probably resonated particularly strongly with the expatriate community, on whose consumption practices and cultures more work would be extremely useful. *Vogue*'s map did not just imply that the West End was a world player, but that it was pivotal within an international network of fashionable consumption for foreigners. In order to examine this assumption, the role of West End shopping as part of the tourist experience of Britain is examined, through store advertising aimed at these markets and the content of tourist guides for the home and foreign market. This analysis is then contextualised through an exploration of the international shopping maps of American and French editions of *Vogue*.

Guidebooks created distinctive 'tourist' Londons, painting its image and mapping out its spaces. The 1930s was a period of growth in the British tourist industry, reaching a peak in 1937, the coronation year. Hence, constructions of London through tourist texts, for an audience of national and international visitors, became increasingly pervasive and London

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<sup>79</sup> *Vogue*, 19 February 1936.

<sup>80</sup> Such a picture is evidenced in article by British designer Victor Stiebel, 'The Mechanics of Fashion', *Commercial Art and Industry*, July 1935, 3-15.

<sup>81</sup> See for example the article on relationship between the American paper dress pattern and promulgation of French fashions etc. *Vogue* (New York), 1 February 1940, 112-3



thus became a self-consciously ‘tourist’ city.<sup>82</sup> A special ‘British travel’ issue of *Art and Industry* reported,

Some years ago Great Britain was a comparatively untravelled country. Almost unawares a travel industry has sprung up with many agencies spread all over the world. Its pageantry, its traditional aspects, its stability in the midst of a disturbed state of affairs, are all the causes of a reawakening of interest in what a German writer not very long since called the ‘unknown island.’<sup>83</sup>

[Figure 3.20] Within this flurry of tourist literature, the West End was consistently positioned as a key element of London’s special nature. For example the curve of Regent Street was used as a backdrop in the Pullman Car Company’s eulogy to ‘London the wonder city’.<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, it is apparent that shopping itself had a key role within tourism, both in terms of the presentation of West End shops as tourist ‘sights’, and the portrayal of the practice of shopping as a leisure activity for tourists. As *Art and Industry* claimed, ‘London’s shops are part of London’s attractions. Almost every visitor makes a point of seeing what London offers the shopper.’<sup>85</sup> [Figure 3.21] This treatment of the West End within London guides reflected a broader entanglement of consumption and vacation. For instance, an advertisement in American *Vogue* promoted the purchase of the holiday wardrobe as a key component of a trip to Miami, rather than as a preparation to be undertaken in advance.<sup>86</sup> Thomas Cook responded to the same trend through its shopping department within Berkeley Street Head Office in the West End, which offered free advice to visitors.<sup>87</sup>

By including shopping in the repertoire of tourist practices, alongside museum visiting, and seeing ‘the sights’, it was ascribed cultural importance, and acknowledged as a defining aspect of the tourist experience and of London life. Laurence Neal claimed, ‘For the foreign visitor the stores ... provide the best available bird’s eye view of a country’s national life’.<sup>88</sup> On the other hand, the frequent positioning of shopping within subsidiary ‘entertainment’ and ‘information’ sections of guidebooks ascribed it a lower, and often implicitly feminine, status. In some of the more ‘serious’ guides, such negative associations were apparent: visitors were taken on walks through the heart of the shopping district without a mention of shops. For

<sup>82</sup> Guidebooks’ treatment of London around this time, and their impact on understandings of London, are discussed in more depth in Gilbert and Henderson, ‘London and the Tourist Imagination’.

<sup>83</sup> *Art and Industry*, September 1936, 81.

<sup>84</sup> *London: the Wonder City*, the Pullman Car Company, 1937, 7.

<sup>85</sup> ‘Come to Britain!’, *Art and Industry*, September 1936, 86.

<sup>86</sup> *Vogue* (New York), 15 January 1940, 9.

<sup>87</sup> *London: A Combined Guidebook and Atlas*, London: Thomas Cook and Son, 1937, 22.

<sup>88</sup> Lawrence E. Neal, *Retailing and the Public*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1932, 18.



example, in 1937, a Thomas Cook guide took visitors along Piccadilly obtusely ignoring the newly opened, and visually unavoidable, Simpson store.<sup>89</sup> There is also sometimes a message that the heritage of shopping was not sufficiently important to lend a street serious historic and cultural importance as a tourist trail. One guide ignored the iconic status of Bond Street discussed in Part I, writing disparagingly, ‘Its historic interest is not overwhelming. The shuffling of Georgian, Victorian, Edwardian - and again Georgian - society up and down a highway which reflects in its windows and luxurious interiors the successive tastes of the social pageant, provides its chief claim to historical notice.’<sup>90</sup>

However, for the most part, the illustrations, maps and text of guidebooks contradicted such high cultural pretensions. It is clear that West End shop buildings themselves, as iconic architecture and city spectacle, had a key role within tourism: individually and collectively they constituted ‘sights’ of London. [Figure 3.22] D. H. McCullough’s guidebook *London* featured a double-spread of snapshots of quintessentially ‘London’ views, in which a view of Selfridges at night was placed alongside a traditional coach builder’s premises, tennis at Wimbledon and a West End theatre queue.<sup>91</sup> Charles Dunckner’s guide for ‘teens’ included a walking tour of Oxford Street and Regent Street, in which he paused at Selfridges to note that it was, ‘a wonderful building, which was exquisitely decorated for the Coronation celebrations [of 1937], and was one of the sights of London during that period.’<sup>92</sup>

Collectively, these representations of the West End shopping streets as ‘sights’ and as a venue for tourist activity makes clear the important role of these places within tourist London. However, the best efforts of the tourist industry to foreground tourist spending did not necessarily imply the West End *was* operating successfully within an international shopping map. A study of the role of London within the international geographies of American and French editions of *Vogue* tempers our view of the West End’s importance in international shopping maps, and would suggest a new reading of British *Vogue*’s geography.

<sup>89</sup> *London: A Combined Guidebook and Atlas*, London: Thomas Cook and Son, 1937.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>91</sup> D. H. McCullough, *London*, London: Travel and Industrial Development Association of Great Britain and Ireland, 1938, 48-9.

<sup>92</sup> Charles A. Dunckner, *Seeing London with my Young Friends: a Guide to all the Places of Interest in London*, 1936, 120.



*Vogue* was a tripartite business during the 1930s, with editions published in London, New York and Paris; British *Vogue* being the primary source for this thesis.<sup>93</sup> All three editions were American owned. Some content was shared between editions, and each painted an atlas of fashionable life that privileged the other two nations above other places, using them as constant points of comparison with which to define their own cultures. British *Vogue*'s article 'A Tale of Chic in Three Cities' is a typical example.<sup>94</sup> However, each version of *Vogue* had its own staff, distinctive style, editorial slant and advertisers. Most importantly, the city of publication infused each edition: New York and Paris were portrayed as the focus of fashionable life and consumption in the American and French editions respectively, just as London was the pivot for British *Vogue*. Each sketched out its own shopping geography, with fashion features, directories and shopping columns. For example, American *Vogue* even had its own version of the 'Shop-hound' column mirroring the column in British *Vogue* considered in Chapter 4. Links were also made by each to differently structured national and international networks with listings of shops where featured goods could be bought.<sup>95</sup>

It is immediately obvious that within American and French *Vogue*'s international networks, London was not primarily presented as a modern centre of fashion or fashionable consumption, although very occasionally guides to London shopping did appear.<sup>96</sup> These editions usually characterised it by tradition rather than modernity, by sites of heritage rather than of consumption. Coverage highlighted country-based elite pursuits, for example Nancy Mitford's article for an American audience, 'The English Shooting Party',<sup>97</sup> or accounts of metropolitan society etiquette. A humorous article on the marriage market by Cecil Beaton entitled 'Americans in London' stressed the difficulties of reading the geographies of English society life for Americans, 'when they come to London they are rather lost. There is no one spot in which every one clusters and congregates. It takes some time to get going, to meet people, to get "into the know"'.<sup>98</sup> This was a particular kind of Britain: typical advertisements for British railways featured a tartan-clad Bonnie Prince Charlie and Shakespeare's Stratford.<sup>99</sup>

<sup>93</sup> *Vogue* was initially just published in the United States and distributed internationally, but publication started in London in 1916, when shipments of the publication were disrupted by the war. The French edition started in 1923. All three editions were owned by American publisher Condé Nast.

<sup>94</sup> *Vogue*, 5 January 1938, 16-17, 58.

<sup>95</sup> For example American *Vogue* listing for readers exactly where they could buy 'Finds of the Fortnight' featured in the magazine, illustrated with a woman pointing to locations on a map of the United States. *Vogue* (New York), 1 January 1935, 62-3, 8j. In 1930, American *Vogue* informed readers where the title could be bought in Madrid, Paris, Berlin, Brussels, Vienna and Rome. *Vogue* (New York), 29 March 1930, 20.

<sup>96</sup> See for example the directory of shops entitled 'London Address Book' published in *Vogue* (New York), 15 June and 15 October 1934.

<sup>97</sup> *Vogue* (New York), 29 March 1930, 58-9, 84.

<sup>98</sup> *Vogue* (New York), 10 May 1930, 152.

<sup>99</sup> *Vogue* (New York), 12 April 1930, adjacent to 48, 52.



[Figure 3.23] Coverage of British fashion and shopping mirrored this approach. Fashion features and advertisements for British fashions focused on English tweeds and Scottish tartans. For example, American *Vogue* wrote in the article ‘British Alliance’, ‘Hear the word “tweeds” and all that is indigenous to British life – mist-shrouded moors, heather, gorse, grouse-shooting – comes immediately to mind’.<sup>100</sup> Additionally, and connectedly, they highlighted the masculine. One American *Vogue* article on London shops revealed a view of the West End which celebrated the traditional, masculine shops rather than the modern departures that might be valued by the British shoppers, ““What can I buy that is typically English?” asks the visitor to London. “What clothes can I get here that are better than anything of the sort anywhere else?” ... Look in the men’s shops. Not for nothing is London famed as the highest authority on men’s fashions’.<sup>101</sup> Similarly, French *Vogue* notes the essential tradition and masculinity of the West End’s shopping cultures, ‘Mayfair est moins un quartier qu’une manière de vivre et de penser “gentry”... C’est en regardant ces vitrines qu’on s’aperçoit que Londres est la ville la plus civilisée du monde ... La coquetterie de Londres, est une coquetterie masculine : celle de la femme est considérée comme un art mineur, annexe, qu’il ne faut pas laisser gagner la course.’<sup>102</sup>

American *Vogue*’s territory of international consumption gave Paris a much more important position than London. Whilst largely overlooking British designers, American *Vogue* lauded French fashions and designers and overtly acknowledged their influence on American fashions, with frequent ‘Paris fashion’ editions.<sup>103</sup> 1930s advertisements in the journal reveal a francophilia in the adoption of French names and associations, for example the New York based ‘Lily of France’ corset company and Mello-glo cosmetic powder, recommended as ‘c’est Paris... as smart as Paris itself.’<sup>104</sup> In addition, Paris was presented as a city to shop in. Readers were provided a fashionable navigation of city’s shops through articles such as ‘A guide to the seeker for gifts in the turmoil of Paris shopping’<sup>105</sup> and ‘Highways and Buyways of Paris’ which advised, ‘To reach Gabry’s smart little handkerchief shop, at 18 rue Godot-de-Mauroy, you must pass through the Galerie des Quatre Chemins, which often has exhibits of very good modern paintings and invariably has interesting French editions of modern

<sup>100</sup> *Vogue* (New York), 15 October 1934, 72.

<sup>101</sup> *Vogue* (New York) 21 June 1930, 54.

<sup>102</sup> ‘La Symphonie de Londres’, *Vogue* (Paris), July 1938, 42. [‘Mayfair is not just an area of London, it is first and foremost a grand way of living. It’s the shop windows that make you realise that London is the most civilised city in the world. London chic is masculine; women’s fashion is considered an optional extra, a lesser art that shouldn’t take centre stage.’]

<sup>103</sup> See for example, ‘Paris suggests the directoire mode at night’, *Vogue* (New York), 12 April 1930, 86.

<sup>104</sup> *Vogue* (New York), April 12 1940, 28; *Vogue* (New York), 15 February 1935, 97.

<sup>105</sup> *Vogue* (New York), 10 May 1930, 158.



‘THE FEMININE WORLD OF FASHION, FROM CHINA TO PERU, HAS HEARD OF BOND STREET.’

books.’<sup>106</sup> Sometimes *Vogue* carried a series of advertisements for Parisian shops and designers collected together in pages titled ‘The Shops of *Vogue* in Paris’, functioning as a directory to the city.

[Figure 3.24] It is important to recognise that American *Vogue* commodified and constructed Paris specifically for its American readers. In 1930, the Service Aimcee advertised in *Vogue*, a ‘centrally located, intelligently planned, helpfully staffed information and guidance office, with the American point of view, for American visitors in Paris’.<sup>107</sup> The service had been set up by American department store and provided a peculiarly American version of Paris, suggesting an American’s navigation of Paris structured by the questions, ‘What shall I take home to Cousin Amanda? Where can my husband get ham and eggs? Where can I read American magazines? What “little” dressmaker in Paris combines real style with moderate prices? Where shall I have my mail sent? Where can I make reservations for theatre tickets ...wagon lits ... steamer accommodations ... airplane flights ... sightseeing tours ... automobile jaunts?’<sup>108</sup> [Figure 3.25] Marshall Field department store boasted in a *Vogue* advertisement that it was ‘Transplanting Paris’ to the States, depicting a ‘typical’ Paris scene delivered to Americans by liner and train:

At a famous numero of the rue de la Paix, appraising eyes review passing creations ... Somewhere on the rue St. Honoré a man who has bought millions of gloves for us selects several of the better new styles ... These are some of Marshall Field and Company’s large staff of resident representatives in Paris. In addition, scores of men and women from Field’s in Chicago visit Paris periodically. Alert, fashion-wise, their purchases reflect an intimate knowledge of Continental correctness. You are cordially invited to come to Field’s for almost anything you might like from Paris.<sup>109</sup>

[Figure 3.26] As a 1930 American *Vogue* cover graphically illustrated, Paris was shipped in by the magazine for America’s amusement, its fashions the plaything of the reader. Despite this appropriation, Paris remained conceptualised as somewhere ‘other’, the ‘extremes’ of Paris fashion, such as the Indian-inspired fashions of Spring 1935, felt to be not quite acceptable for the American audience:

Had a string of sacred elephants been led into the Spring Collections, the shock could not have been greater than when Sciaparelli and Alix ushered in their astonishing Hindu evening dresses. Seductive

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<sup>106</sup> *Vogue* (New York), 29 March 1930, 20.

<sup>107</sup> *Vogue* (New York), 4 January 1930, 5.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> *Vogue* (New York), 24 May 1930, 5.



saris. Ihram headscarfs. Mysterious, gauzy drapery. Nautsch-girl sandals. The press scribbled wildly. The buyers gaped. Only the private French clients seemed unaghast ... Among the American contingent, questions flew thick and fast. Would New York wear these robes?<sup>110</sup>

Paris haute couture seemed happy to play this game, self-consciously designing for the foreign market in a different way than it did for the home market.

[Figure 2.2] French *Vogue*, on the other hand, was much more insular than either the British or American edition. Interestingly, in contrast to these editions’ respective portrayals of London and New York, Paris was conceptualised largely as a fashion, not as a shopping city, and it was this evolution that was mapped out on its pages, encapsulated in ‘Le Rond-Point de la Couture’, encountered in Chapter 2.<sup>111</sup>

Importantly, these international networks of shopping, fashion and tourism were not altogether static. Whilst French *Vogue* remained largely concerned with Paris, during the 1930s, American *Vogue* reflected an American fashion industry increasingly confident in home-grown designs, a movement accelerated but not instigated by difficulties in accessing Paris during the second world war. [Figure 3.27] In 1938, the magazine had established an annual ‘Americana Issue’ with an entirely new geography, devoted to American fashions, complementing special ‘Paris collections’ issues. The 1940 Americana issue included an extensive directory of the rising stars of American fashion design.<sup>112</sup> By this time, Marshall Field had stopped ‘transplanting Paris’ and advertised clothes expressing ‘American affinity’.<sup>113</sup> Similarly, Enka Rayon displayed their fabrics printed with ‘early American’ designs.<sup>114</sup> American fashion had a new-found self-confidence which was shifting its relationship with international networks, expressed in the editorial, ‘It is no news that American clothes today have a definite and recognisable quality of their own. Sometimes, they have achieved this by purely American design; sometimes by the intelligent adaptation, evolution, or naturalisation of French designs. But however it is accomplished, the fact is that in their own field they have a quality recognised all over the world of fashion; and in their best expression, they are delightful not only to American women of sophisticated taste, but to smart internationals as well. What *is* news is the stirring life in the creative field of American clothes

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<sup>110</sup> *Vogue* (New York), 15 March 1935, 51.

<sup>111</sup> ‘Le Rond-Point de la Couture’ *Vogue* (Paris), December 1935, 29.

<sup>112</sup> *Vogue* (New York), 1 February 1940, 147-9.

<sup>113</sup> *Vogue* (New York), 1 January 1940, adjacent to 8h.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 8b.



... we are newly eager to stamp every expression of our lives “American”.<sup>115</sup> Tourism, and therefore access to European shops, also shifted through the period. The American love affair with Europe had suffered a blow during the depression, but was picking up by the mid thirties,<sup>116</sup> only to be halted again by the drift to war.

In conclusion, this dissonance between the British, French and American conceptions of London and the West End explored in this chapter reflects the existence of a multiplicity of nationally as well as class-inflected imagined networks.<sup>117</sup> The chapter ends with an advertisement of 1930 in the *Evening Standard* for Austin Reed’s Regent Street shop,

‘Is that Regent 7911? Fine. Your name was given to me by a friend back home in Philadelphia. He said you delivered the snappiest haberdashery in Europe. Fine ... I’ll be right over.’ Our transatlantic customer duly arrived at tremendous speed. He dashed into our Tie Department and began to buy rapidly. ‘Boy, this certainly is dandy haberdashery,’ he vouchsafed. ‘I’m only sorry I can’t get some English suits and overcoats while I’m here. I’m sailing on Saturday on the Aquitania.’ We pointed out that we could supply him with everything connected with the masculine wardrobe from hats to shoes ... With rapidly rising enthusiasm he bought something in nearly every department ... He even enquired as to the possibility of buying a controlling interest in the business. We arranged to make the few necessary tailoring alterations that day and to deliver the goods to the Aquitania. An hour later a ’phone call came through. ‘Supposing,’ he said, ‘your stuff arrives on the Aquitania and some of the alterations are just not O.K.?’ We explained that the idea was almost inconceivable, but if any goods did not afford complete satisfaction it was only necessary to apply to our shop on A. Deck where any such garment would be exchanged or the price refunded, which ever he preferred. ‘Am I to understand,’ he said in awestruck tones, ‘that you actually have a branch shop on the Aquitania?’ ‘You certainly are,’ we replied, replacing the receiver with nonchalance.<sup>118</sup>

This advertisement is important in a number of respects. Clearly, Austin Reed was operating internationally at this time, through their shop on the liner ‘Aquitania’, and was targeting services at short-stay foreign visitors. But the placement of this advertisement in the *Evening Standard* meant that this portrayal of the West End within North America’s shopping network was intended for a London audience. This suggests that shopping practices and goods accrued meaning through wrapping them with this imagined international context, and that British

<sup>115</sup> *Vogue* (New York), 1 February 1940, 86.

<sup>116</sup> ‘The American craze for England is growing in leaps and bounds. All the American ‘social head-liners’ now include England in their yearly rounds, as regularly as clockwork. Their routine is apt to be this: a fortnight’s hard work in Paris with dressmakers; a month or six weeks fun in England, with a return visit to Paris; a fast crossing to America; a fortnight or so of the New York season around Christmas, and then points south.’ ‘London after dark’, *Vogue* (New York), 1 January 1935, 84.

<sup>117</sup> This accords with Woollacott’s findings about the specificity of Australian women’s experience of London around this time. Angela Woollacott, ‘The Metropole as Antipodes: Australian Women in London and Constructing National Identity’, in Pamela Gilbert, (ed.) *Imagined Londons*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002, 85-99.

<sup>118</sup> *Evening Standard*, 1 February 1930.







constructions of international shopping networks in which the West End had an important place for foreigners were meaningful for a British audience. This was an audience for whom the suggestion that ‘The feminine world of fashion, from China to Peru, has heard of Bond Street’<sup>119</sup> attached value to shopping in the West End.

This study of the West End’s positioning within various imagined international maps, and the issues raised by studies such as Woollacott’s, invites further consideration than is possible here of how far suggestions of the West End’s centrality held purchase within an expatriate community at this time. British *Vogue* publicised its availability from any bookseller in the British Dominions and Dependencies,<sup>120</sup> and the limited evidence available from oral histories and directories of Vogue dress pattern availability both suggest an important *Vogue*-reading expatriate community from Rome to Delhi with a shared investment in London’s metropolitan consumption cultures, despite their physical distance from the place.<sup>121</sup> The imagined nature of maps explored in Part I allows for the meaningful nature of such understandings of the West End’s position.

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<sup>119</sup> *London: A Combined Guidebook and Atlas*, London: Thomas Cook and Son, 1937, p.xiii.

<sup>120</sup> *Vogue*, 24 July 1935, back cover.

<sup>121</sup> *Vogue*, 2 October 1935, 158, Hampshire Record Office, AV550, ‘Home dressmaking Reassessed’.



## 4.

### ‘LONDON TOWN IS MOVING ROUND’: SHIFTING MAPS OF THE WEST END.

Chapter 4 argues that the important role of West End shopping cultures was connected to the way its internal networks were assembled. This partly involves a recognition of the richness of the area that was afforded by the differently functioning component parts: shops, cafés, clubs and so on. However, this study is particularly interested in adding a spatial dimension, and breaks the West End down into elements of streets, routes and networks. Indeed, the shopping street is suggested as the key to understanding West End shopping: it was a *component* used to construct the place and its representations, it was the basis for the *experience* of the shopping there, and was a *symbol* for its shopping cultures. Thus the shopping street and configurations of streets are shown to be a key element in, and expression of, shopping cultures of the 1930s, revealing especially of their gender- and class-inflected nature.

The West End comprised a collection of retail areas and this chapter focuses the tight cluster of streets in the heart of the West End around and between Oxford Street, Regent Street, Bond Street and Piccadilly that was acknowledged as ‘London’s most fashionable shopping district.’<sup>1</sup> This chapter’s survey of the formation of shopping routes within this area, and the labelling of different streets within these routes, contributes to a central investigation of this

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<sup>1</sup> *London: What to See and Where to Stay: The Residential Hotels and Caterers Association*, 1930, 48.



thesis: how the West End was constructed in different media, and how it was imagined by the different groups of people that moved within it.

Firstly, the character of the web of streets, the complex transport network and the patchwork of businesses that made up this internal network is examined, before considering the particular identity of the area's most important streets. Then, two case studies are used as a means of exploring aspects of how this network functioned. The first case study is an examination of the transformative effect of Simpsons' opening in 1936 on the West End's masculine consumption map. It addresses the question of how different routes were configured and transformed through the consideration of an individual store in its street context. The second case study looks at *Vogue*'s 'Shop-hound' column as one important narrative of the city that constructed and navigated the shifting map of feminine consumption for its readers. It is a study that underlines the complexity and texture of the imagined city.

## THE WEST END STREET

It is a central tenet of this thesis that for 1930s West End shopping, the cultures of the shopping street were as important as the transactions that took place inside the shops. The street was the element through which networks and routes were constituted, which as Part I argues, were central to the workings of 1930s consumption cultures. The street was also the space where shops were encountered, window-shopping took place, and being 'in town' was performed. The street was furthermore central to how the West End was thought about: providing the framework for the construction of shopping trips, and constituting its iconic landmarks: Bond Street, Oxford Street and so on.

[Figure 4.1] In a broader sense, the street network was an important mechanism for representing and imagining London. The map of London's streets became an iconic image that evoked the capital, as exemplified in a Great Western Railway poster of the period.<sup>2</sup> It was constantly replicated in tourists' maps and the aerial photographs of picture postcards, but was also drawn in the text of guidebooks transport guides, street directories, the shopping columns of women's magazines. [Figure 4.2] The West End map was also easily recognisable, and was similarly used to articulate consumption cultures within store publicity. Austin Reed's

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<sup>2</sup> Great Western Railway poster, illustrated in *Commercial Art*, March 1931, 127.



advertisement, ‘Dress wear at Austin Reed’s of Regent Street’, for example portrayed a metropolitan type emerging from just such a map, symbolising his attachment to, and indeed, origins in, this place.<sup>3</sup>

This chapter’s arguments about the elemental, experiential and symbolic role of the shopping street draws on a body of work that highlights the importance of the street within modern urban cultures. Fyfe comments, ‘Streets ... have always held a particular fascination for those interested in the city. Streets are the terrain of social encounters and political protest, sites of domination and resistance, places of pleasure and anxiety.’<sup>4</sup> Importantly, this field supports an argument for the role of the street within the imagined and physical cities, approaching the street as the ‘representation of space’, constructed by planners and architects, but also mediated through the lived experience of inhabitants. This provides a useful basis for this study, which seeks to explore how shopping routes differentiated according to gender, class and modernity functioned within the West End, and were constructed in various urban narratives.

The literature has frequently claimed the street as both the location and the emblem of modernity, as expressed by Schlör, ‘the symbol of “modernity” is ... the street. For critics as well as apologists of the city, it is the central figure of the urban description, as metaphor and as material reality; it is the site of encounter and confrontation.’<sup>5</sup> For modern architects, planners and theorists, including Haussman, Benjamin and Le Corbusier, the modern street effected the rationalisation of the city, representing an aspect of modernity that recurs through this thesis. Subsequently, historians have drawn on Berman’s theories of modernity to interpret the modernity of the street in terms of the practices and experiences that took place there.<sup>6</sup> For example, Schlör discusses the modern experience of the lit street at night, and Rendell has pointed to the urban journeys of the *flâneur*.<sup>7</sup> For shopping historians, women’s access to city streets has been an important element of the claims for the modernity of emergent department store cultures.<sup>8</sup> Within this study the West End street is similarly linked to the modernity of 1930s shopping cultures: it was a place which provided possibilities for

<sup>3</sup> Austin Reed advertisement, *Art and Industry*, 1939, 10.

<sup>4</sup> Nicholas Fyfe, ‘Reading the street’ in Fyfe (ed.), *Images of the Street: Planning, Identity and Control in Public Space*, London and New York: Routledge, 1998, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Schlör, *Nights in the Big City*, 17.

<sup>6</sup> Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air*, 1983.

<sup>7</sup> Jane Rendell, ‘Ramblers and Cyprians: Mobility, Visuality and the Gendering of Architectural Space’ in Louise Durning and Richard Wrigley (eds.), *Gender and Architecture*, John Wiley and Sons, 2000; Schlör, *Nights in the Big City*.

<sup>8</sup> Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*.



movement and connection, but was also the site of the less ordered, more spectacular aspects of shopping cultures.

In the 1930s West End, the ‘modernity’ of movement and system, and the ‘backwardness’ of chaos were in constant tension within the street, continuing a duality noted by Nead in her discussion of Victorian London.<sup>9</sup> By the 1930s, London’s transport infrastructure was mature and well used, as discussed earlier in Chapter 3. The city’s shopping streets conveyed crowds of pedestrians, and, increasingly, motor vehicles, linking into networks of tubes and buses. Indeed, the period was characterised by shifts in this balance due to the growth, and envisioned explosion, of road traffic. By the 1930s, taxis were being recommended to visitors as ‘plentiful and cheap’<sup>10</sup> and were a preferred mode of transport for the *Vogue* shopping columnist. The private ownership of cars was also rising, accompanied by a rash of West End car dealers.<sup>11</sup> Handling this traffic was becoming a major concern of strategic planning for the city’s streets: for example the Greater London Regional Planning Committee reported in 1933, ‘Motor traffic can no longer be regarded as a passing phase catering to the pleasure of a few people, but has become an integral and substantial part of the national system of transport both for passengers and goods.’<sup>12</sup> [Figure 4.3] Much of the discussion was about speeding up the flow of traffic through the city, but there was also a recognition that people would use private cars to visit central London, evidenced in the inclusion of information about parking on published maps and street plans. This increasingly complex transport system, although billed as ‘modern’, verged on the undecipherable, leading to the publication of detailed guides for navigating London.<sup>13</sup>

[Figure 4.4] The kinetic nature of the street infused representations of West End shopping in the 1930s: constant pedestrian and vehicular traffic that could stimulate, disorientate or assault. In 1930, the *Evening Standard* reported an incident, where shoppers had been endangered by their proximity to the street,

Women in the busiest part of Kensington High Street found themselves confronted by a runaway horse and van at mid-day today. The horse dashed across the road and appeared about to gallop on to the footpath, where hundreds of women were inspecting the shop windows, when a bus ... headed it off.

<sup>9</sup> Nead, *Victorian Babylon*.

<sup>10</sup> *The London Guide*, London: The Automobile Association, 1934, 33.

<sup>11</sup> For example, *Kelly’s Post Office London Directory* of 1936 records the existence of Rootes Ltd motor car distributors, Citroën Cars Ltd motor car makers and Henlys Ltd automobile agents at Devonshire House in Piccadilly.

<sup>12</sup> *Second Report of the Greater London Regional Planning Committee*, March 1933, 60.

<sup>13</sup> See for example, J. C. Willis, *The Tube-Bus Guide to London*, Cambridge: W. Heffer and Sons, 1928.



The horse and bus met in collision. The shafts of the van were smashed and the horse was thrown to the ground. Several women were taken into Messrs Pontings shop for treatment.<sup>14</sup>

This report highlights the uneasy relationship between the ‘modernity’ of urban movement and rational transport systems, and the ‘backward’ chaos of city streets. Parades, events, display and architectural diversity were also part of this street cacophony, F. E. Bennett writing in *The Builder*, ‘The street of shops attacks the eye very much as the noises of an eastern market attack the ear.’<sup>15</sup> Some blamed transformations in the scale of contemporary retail architecture, specifically increased building heights, for overloading London’s streets with traffic.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, there was a tradition of imaginative architectural and planning proposals to remedy the perceived problem of the shopping streets, notably Joseph Paxton’s Victorian scheme for a giant covered street around central London.<sup>17</sup>

Proposals such as Paxton’s and A Trystan Edwards’ overlooked the fact that the tumult of the street was the lifeblood of the West End’s modern consumption cultures. As far as the larger West End retailers were concerned, they certainly wanted on one hand to offer an attractive, modern shopping experience and frequently depicted their stores as an oasis of calm. On the other hand, they required large volumes of passing traffic for business success, and this chapter considers the sophisticated ways in which they positioned themselves within this network of streets and related their own internal circulation routes to it. Furthermore it would seem that West End shopping *desired* this tension: representations of shopping incorporated both skilled, well-planned purchasing and a less ordered, pleasurable experience of the city, carried along by the speed of modern metropolitan life. The West End’s kineticism reflected the urgent, irregular rhythms of fashion and consumption that were so integral to its function.

The West End street also constituted a building block with which West End maps, routes and trips were constructed. One of the points made in this chapter is that the nature of the West End as an assemblage of elements was particularly important in constructions of the feminine consumer in comparison with representations of her masculine counterpart, whose visits were constructed in different ways in the 1930s. Her trip involved a careful combination of different types of activities, a recipe that required a mastery of the West End in all its forms. The shopping trip was part of a broader activity of being ‘in town’, and relied on the concentration

<sup>14</sup> *Evening Standard*, 1 January 1930, 14.

<sup>15</sup> F. E. Bennett A.R.I.B.A. ‘The Shop’, *The Builder*, 1 February 1929, 241.

<sup>16</sup> A Trystan Edwards, *The Architecture of Shops*, London: Chapman and Hall, 1933, 61-3.

<sup>17</sup> Nead, *Victorian Babylon*, 27-9.



of a different venues for the pursuit of urban leisure. The richness of the Victorian and Edwardian West End experience has been described by Rappaport, ‘Together, the shops, stately homes, clubhouses, spacious parks and squares, entertainments, and royal palaces lent the West End a unique prestige as the centre of power, wealth, and pleasure in the empire.’<sup>18</sup> This chapter suggests that the patchwork image continued to be important in the 1930s. For example, the magazine *Vogue* ran a regular diary entitled, ‘*Vogue* covers the town’ which provided information on events, shows, exhibitions, films, restaurants, and nightclubs. A sense of occasion attached itself to this kind of composite metropolitan experience, which was exploited by a series of advertisements for Yardley,

When uncle comes to town ... there’s usually a pleasant little shopping expedition, then lunch at one of the smartest restaurants in town, with perhaps a matinée to follow ... A time to be at one’s brightest and best, well turned out and with the right perfume – nothing showy or assertive – just the simple, charming fragrance of Yardley Lavender is ideal.<sup>19</sup>

This study is interested in highlighting the particularly *spatial* configurations of these trips, for whilst cities were always an amalgam of different elements, at a given moment their precise configuration and a heightened awareness of this mixture, could give character to an area. This study is of course focussed on the cluster of shopping streets at the heart of the West End, but it becomes apparent that even this small area can be seen to comprise a series of discrete routes, subtly differentiated from each other in terms of gender, class and modernity. They joined up into several shopping networks, overlapping, and meeting each other at points of intersection.

The character of individual streets can be interrogated in a straightforward manner using street directories to list their component parts; shops of various sorts, cafes, cinemas, theatres, clubs and so on. This enables a view of how these elements were spatially arranged into streets. But to understand the identity of streets, a more qualitative approach must also be used which addresses the meaning of streets, which involves the imagined and represented geographies suggested by the sources discussed in Part I. This meaning was articulated and constructed through perceptions of a street’s history, and mythologised through successive city guidebooks and other narratives. It was also expressed by defining the various streets and routes against each other. It was reflected in the design of buildings and practice of retail spectacle, as will be

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<sup>18</sup> Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*, 9.

<sup>19</sup> *Vogue*, 20 March 1935, 1



explored later in the thesis. These processes led to the creation of iconic and specialised streets, of the kind noted in Thomas Cook's London guide, 'Certain streets in all the great capital cities of the world develop a personality which is among their greatest assets. The Rue de la Paix, of Paris, the Kalverstraat, of Amsterdam, and, more definitely even than these, Bond Street, of London, possess this character.'<sup>20</sup>

The identities of these individual streets were important. They structured the narratives of the West End in guides and other textual commentaries, they made sense of street plans and transport maps, and provided a foundation for many store advertising campaigns. It is clear that the character of shopping streets was culturally important: attempts to alter this were both contested and celebrated. For instance, Rappaport describes the drawn out battle over the rebuilding of Regent Street earlier in the previous decades, whilst also describing the pageantry attached to its official 'reopening'.<sup>21</sup> This chapter uncovers similar controversies with regards to the way shifting masculine consumption routes were redefining the character of streets.

It is worth unpacking the web of streets within this central territory to reveal its most prominent places. The great thoroughfares formed the skeleton of the area. Stretching to the west of Piccadilly Circus was Piccadilly, established home of the department store Fortnum and Mason, and also Simpsons, one of London's key retail and architectural events of the 1930s. It was also noted for its exclusive clubs and hotels, including the Piccadilly and the Ritz. These were situated amongst more weighty landmarks such as Burlington House with its host of learned societies, and also the London residences of figures such as the Dukes of York and Wellington. *The World's Largest City* termed this street 'one of the world's most famous streets' and 'the great resort of the leisured and wealthy'.<sup>22</sup>

[Figure 4.5] Heading north from Piccadilly Circus was Regent Street. This West End shopping street had perhaps the most clearly controlled and coherent visual identity due to its recent rebuilding. However, undercutting the associations of imperial, masculine state cultures was Regent Street's longer history. In the early nineteenth century, Nash had laid it out in its present form, and it was always intended as a locus for fashionable and luxury shopping.<sup>23</sup> In the 1930s it remained a dedicated shopping route, housing many famous stores, including the

<sup>20</sup> *London: A Combined Guidebook and Atlas*, London: Thomas Cook and Son, 1937, p.xiii.

<sup>21</sup> Rappaport, 'Art, Commerce, or Empire?', 94-117.

<sup>22</sup> *London: The World's Largest City*, Edinburgh: A. Walker and Son, 1938, 9.

<sup>23</sup> Hobhouse, *A History of Regent Street*.



department stores Robinson and Cleaver, Liberty, Dickens and Jones, Galleries Lafayette, also clothes shops Aquascutum, Austin Reed, and Jaeger, Mappin and Webb jewellers and Hamley's toy store. 1930s guidebooks identify the street as a highly important luxury shopping street and also as a connecting route between two important hubs:

... a street of fascination, in which feminine and other needs and vanities are exhibited with all the allure of which the modern window dresser is capable. It is at all times of the day, and more than half way through the night, thronged with a kaleidoscopic and cosmopolitan crowd, drawn thither by the shops and restaurants, or merely passing through between Piccadilly and Oxford Circus.<sup>24</sup>

[Figure 4.6] Oxford Street was another major arterial route, 'one of the principal thoroughfares connecting the City with the West End',<sup>25</sup> carrying large volumes of traffic across London. Unlike Regent Street, it had developed piecemeal, and was the place in this heartland of consumption where department store owners' tastes and architects' flair was given the freest reign by regulators. This resulted in a visual identity that was self-consciously modern, fashionable and spectacular, if also considered a little vulgar. It was another concentrated stretch of famous shops, termed by Thomas Cook a 'ladies paradise',<sup>26</sup> echoing the name of Zola's store and identifying the street with clearly gendered consumption. *London: What to See and Where to Stay* described it in 1930, 'throughout its length of a mile and a quarter from Marble Arch to Tottenham Court Road ... practically an unbroken succession of retail stores, many of them amongst the largest in the country.'<sup>27</sup> Its class profile differed from that of Regent Street, as Thomas Cook's guide noted, 'Its shops are perhaps of rather more popular appeal than those of Regent Street.'<sup>28</sup> It certainly contained some of the big stores: Selfridges, Bourne and Hollingsworth, Waring and Gillow, Peter Robinson and Marshall and Snelgrove. However, this part of the department store trail was also flavoured by stores like D. H. Evans and John Lewis, which despite their recent lavish rebuilding schemes, were characterised above all by keenly competitive pricing. D. H. Evans' chairman reported, 'Oxford Street is a splendid but highly competitive shopping thoroughfare, thronged with most discriminating shoppers. It is only by selling at the smallest possible margin of profit that increased trade can be looked for.'<sup>29</sup> In addition, it was home to independent and chain stores which more overtly targeted the lower-middle class: C&A Modes, Drages furniture store, Dolcis, Marks and

<sup>24</sup> *London: A Combined Guidebook and Atlas*, London: Thomas Cook and Son, 1937, p.xix.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p.xxiii.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>27</sup> *London: What to See and Where to Stay*, London: Residential Hotels and Caterers Association, 1930: 48.

<sup>28</sup> *London: A Combined Guidebook and Atlas*, London: Thomas Cook and Son, 1937, p.xxiii.

<sup>29</sup> D. H. Evans Minute book, 11 March 1932, House of Fraser Archives, HF 11/2/2.



Spencer, and Woolworths. These businesses dominated the street scene. For example, Dolcis occupied plots 78-80, 221-223, 329-331 and 468-470. In addition, Lyons Corner Houses and Popular Cafes offering reasonable lunches and teas, whilst dotted through the whole West End, were particularly numerous on Oxford Street.

[Figure 4.7] There were several key points of intersection in the network that contributed in important ways to its character. They were places of movement and connection, but were also liminal spaces that offered various possible consumer pathways and identities. The most important intersections were Piccadilly Circus and Oxford Circus, connecting major West End thoroughfares. However, this chapter explores how stores themselves could also function in this way: links created between the front and back doors of some larger stores. Piccadilly Circus was the most iconic intersection, a nexus of traffic, consumption and cultural networks. It housed the Criterion theatre and was addressed by the stores Lillywhites and Swan and Edgar. It was the junction of several busy streets: Shaftesbury Avenue, Haymarket, Regent Street and Piccadilly. But it also functioned as the focus of a broader cultural network, as expressed by the guidebook *London: The World's Largest City*, 'Piccadilly Circus can be said to be said to be the axle pin of the metropolis ... It is the place that all exiled English men and women abroad think of in their home-sick reveries; and so one may justly describe it as London's throbbing heart.'<sup>30</sup> Photographs and postcards from the 1930s show it as a busy and chaotic place. A popular saying from the period, reproduced on postcards, suggested that you would see the whole world pass before you, if you stood there long enough.<sup>31</sup> [Figure 4.8] It was a linchpin in many textual maps, and its statue of Eros was both an important landmark and an emblem for the West End as a whole.

There was also a mass of smaller streets running behind and between the more prominent thoroughfares. As previously mentioned, one such street, Bond Street, was the West End's most iconic street. [Figure 4.9] It was used as a short hand for all that was distinctive and special about the West End's luxurious and elite fashionable consumption cultures, exploited by Yardley's Bond Street perfume which was advertised as being 'created from rich and rare essences, with a note of luxury and elegance in tune with the famous street of fashion which gives it its name.' Bond Street was accessible from both Oxford Street and Piccadilly, but preserved a distinct and coherent identity. [Figure 4.10] It was more exclusive, quieter and on a smaller scale, both in terms of the types shop, and their architecture. To name a few of its

<sup>30</sup> *London: The World's Largest City*, Edinburgh: A. Walker and Son, 1938, 8.

<sup>31</sup> Postcard of Piccadilly Circus, c.1950s, City of Westminster Archives, D 138 (38).



elegant businesses: Coty and Yardley perfumers, jewellers Lacloche Frères, Asprey and Tiffany and Co., Louis Vuitton trunks, amid a host of court dressmakers, milliners and gown shops. Watching its elite consumption cultures was described by some London guidebooks as an integral part of the tourist experience, Thomas Cook positioned it in a timetable of urban spectacles: ‘...its distinguished clientele most in evidence during the latter part of the morning and the early afternoon.’<sup>32</sup>

Collectively, these significant streets formed the principle elements in the network of feminine shopping in the West End, and thus constituted ‘London’s most fashionable shopping district’. This chapter considers its negotiation, but also uncovers other West End narratives that provided different maps of this place. The following case studies of Simpsons and Vogue contribute to the literature highlighting the selective editing of London through different forms of urban narrative, a process that was discussed in Chapter 2. The segregation of London through its differentiated mapping has been illuminated by Walkowitz, who has described the division of Victorian London, segregated into a West End of fashionable elite consumption and a sinister crime-ridden East End through the processes of mythologising.<sup>33</sup> Rappaport and Breward have collectively told a story of a segregated system of feminine and masculine consumption within the West End: Rappaport describing the establishment of a feminine stronghold in the West End, centred on the major department stores along Regent Street and Oxford Street,<sup>34</sup> and Breward identifying a coexistent group of fashionable male consumers, hidden from existing histories, threading through the back streets of the West End.<sup>35</sup> These case studies re-examine the maps of this territory, revealing the different networks that overlaid the territory of the West End, differentiated according to class, gender and modernity. Whilst Reekie has argued for the increasing segregation of men’s and women’s retailing in the inter-war period, citing the isolation of men’s departments within department stores and the creation of men’s shops as examples of this,<sup>36</sup> this study uncovers routes which variously abutted, overlapped and blended with one another within the West End.

<sup>32</sup> *London: A Combined Guidebook and Atlas*, London: Thomas Cook and Son, 1937, 117.

<sup>33</sup> Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*.

<sup>34</sup> Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*.

<sup>35</sup> Breward *The Hidden Consumer*.

<sup>36</sup> Reekie, *Temptations*, Chapter 5.



## 'THERE IS PROBABLY NO FINER SHOP SITE THAN THIS': POSITIONING SIMPSON PICCADILLY

[Figure 4.11] There was an alternative route of masculine consumption, which was of less interest to the guidebooks and women's magazines, but was fundamental to the West End's consumption patterns, and to London's worldwide reputation for masculine dress. This older geography of masculine consumption threading through the back streets of the West End is described by Breward in his study of Victorian and Edwardian masculine consumption, and was still very much in operation in the 1930s.<sup>37</sup> It had its root in the masculine club land of St James' and stretched north to Savile Row, by way of Jermyn Street, Piccadilly Arcade and Burlington Arcade.

Savile Row's thirty-nine properties were occupied by twenty-eight exclusive tailoring firms, accompanied by the occasional court dressmaker and club. The specialist businesses addressing more 'subsidiary' aspects of traditional elite masculine consumption were concentrated on Jermyn Street, Piccadilly and Burlington Arcades, and surrounding streets. For example, in the Burlington Arcade were a shirtmaker, four tobacconists, a fine art dealer, seven jewellers, seven hosier and glovers, a heraldic stationer, a tie specialist, two bronze retailers, a milliner, a tailor, three bootmakers, an umbrella maker, an outfitter, a perfumier, a cutler, toy shop and a chocolate shop.<sup>38</sup> The business roll-call suggests a place where little had changed over the previous decades. They were also streets steeped in their broader history as a heartland of metropolitan masculinity, as H. V. Morton wrote of Jermyn Street, '... It is a street famed for its bachelor rooms and has housed, among many others, Newton, Gray, Scott and Thackeray.'<sup>39</sup>

It is the transformation in this geography, and a blurring with the feminine map, that forms the focus of the following case study. During the 1930s, London's masculine consumers were emerging from the confines of the West End's back streets, and were to be found occupying the headlines of the trade and popular press, and disrupting the established gendered geographical order. The opening of Simpsons in Piccadilly in 1936 was an important part of this metamorphosis. [Figure 4.12] This case study suggests that the store's precise location within this pre-existing traditional masculine shopping map was crucial both for the store's

<sup>37</sup> Breward *The Hidden Consumer*.

<sup>38</sup> *Kelly's Post Office London Directory*, 1936.

<sup>39</sup> H. V. Morton, *London: A Guide*, London: Methuen, 1937.



identity, and for the transformative effect it had on the West End as a whole, as a new kind of intersection between the routes of masculine and feminine consumption and as a pioneer of new forms of masculine consumption, combining modern retail methods and Modernist style.

In making these claims for the influence of Simpsons on West End routes, this study draws on the ideas about the reconfiguring of cities through the positioning of retail clusters, discussed in Chapter 2. It also relates to the specific history of the West End's shopping geographies, in which individual department stores had taken an active role. For example, the establishment of Whiteley's in Bayswater shifted the balance of consumption westwards between 1860 and 1880, whilst the positioning of Selfridges beyond to west of Duke Street on Oxford Street in 1909 store drew the focus for fashionable trade further west within this street.

Simpsons cast itself as a department store rather than simply a large men's outfitter. This overt positioning in the 'universal provider' tradition might suggest that Simpsons to have operated, or at least attempted to operate, independently from its environment, but this study accords with earlier findings: in the 1930s West End masculine shopping, like its feminine counterpart, was not a dislocated event, but was firmly grounded in the street. The store actively established links with the city beyond its windows. Connections were made with the West End entertainment network through a successful ticket agency for plays shows. Less tangibly, the store addressed a new and distinctively 'West End' masculinity, as will be explored in the Parts II and IV.

Incorporating the street address within the name 'Simpson Piccadilly' did more than simply help customers to find a store: it established an immediate, permanent and specific relationship with this street. [Figure 4.13] This bond was emphasised in every advertisement and catalogue, each press review, every time someone spoke of the store, in a similar fashion to Austin Reed of Regent Street and Bond Street perfume. The name placed the location at the centre of the store's character.

When Simpson Ltd, established Stoke Newington-based manufactures of ready-to-wear tailoring, decided to open a retail store, the precise position within the West End's web of streets, of multiple, fragmented, connected and overlapping routes was carefully chosen. The management issued a statement in 1935, 'One hundred yards from Piccadilly Circus, and with a wide frontage on Piccadilly itself, there will rise during the next year a great, new, and



modern, men's store... There is probably no finer shop site than this in the entire world.'<sup>40</sup> [Figure 4.14] This study uncovers a more nuanced positioning of the store. Crucially, as the floor plan reveals, it had two entrances: one on Piccadilly and the other on Jermyn Street. The shop itself was thus an intersection between two very different retail routes, mediating tensions between old and new approaches to men's retailing and masculinity.

[Figure 4.15] There was a developing understand of the importance of site and routes within the retail profession, which Winship suggests was influenced by American chain store methods.<sup>41</sup> Bryan and Norman Westwood devoted considerable attention to this in *Smaller Retail Shops*, highlighting the need to consider factors such as aspect and slope, the visibility of the site within the street, parking facilities, and volumes of traffic, noting: 'it is better to place high-class shops in streets joining main traffic arteries rather than in such streets themselves'.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, choosing a site and designing a shop became even more complex when routes relating to goods delivery and dispatch were also catered for.<sup>43</sup> Plots of land were weighed up in these terms and the *Architects' Journal* reported that when D. H. Evans decided to lavish funds on building a new store on the site of one of its two Oxford Street plots, it had chosen well: 'The site, being situated amongst such stores as Selfridges, C. & A. Modes, and John Lewis, and being both in Oxford Street and close to Bond Street where the public stream must be counted in millions, is one of the finest drapery sites in the world.'<sup>44</sup> The *Financial Times* added, 'On the west side there is a narrow opening which widens out into Chapel Place, offering a good spot for the trading-dock and despatch department...'<sup>45</sup>

Simpsons, then, was positioned close to the hub of transport and street networks at Piccadilly Circus, allowing the store to tap into the vehicular and pedestrian traffic coming to and moving through the area. As discussed in Chapter 13, this was potentially a mixed blessing due to the 'exclusive' nature of Simpsons' image, and in the future the store would at times regret the disruption caused by traffic.<sup>46</sup> However, these connections were essential to attract the volume of customers necessary to fill a store of Simpsons' proportions, vital for the success of this experimental 'men's department store' venture. This makes sense of the store's

<sup>40</sup> Memorandum issued to small retailers of Simpson Ltd clothes nationwide, c. 1935. Simpsons Archive.

<sup>41</sup> Winship, 'Culture of Restraint', 25.

<sup>42</sup> Westwood, *Smaller Retail Shops*, 13.

<sup>43</sup> Westwood, *Smaller Retail Shops*, 21.

<sup>44</sup> *The Architects' Journal*, 15 September 1938, 429.

<sup>45</sup> *The Financial Times*, 20 May 1936.

<sup>46</sup> 'Mrs Simpson had referred to the bus stop immediately outside our main entrance which caused considerable congestion and interfered with the comfort of the public wanting to view our windows. The Secretary had been instructed to make representations to the London Passenger Transport Board with a view to this bus stop being moved a few yards further west, so as to remove this source of annoyance.' Executive Minutes, 28 March 1955, Simpsons Archive.



eagerness to associate itself with Piccadilly Circus, using the landmark statue of Eros in sales advertisements and store guides for many years, claiming it as a signpost to the store.

Simpsons' main entrance was on Piccadilly, between the National Provincial Bank and Lyons Popular café, a more 'upmarket' format than Lyons' ordinary Corner Houses. This position ensured a place on the well-established feminine shopping artery running from Piccadilly up Regent Street and along Oxford Street. By dressing the store with eye-catching, spectacular architecture and display, the business addressed this route and drew on its cultures of dramatic architectural statement, and by the opulence and novelty of display methods. Simpsons, part department store, also defined itself as one of a new breed of 'man's shop', whose number included Austin Reed. In general these stores increasingly staked a claim for themselves in traditionally feminine shopping routes. This shift in networks was not an exclusively metropolitan phenomenon: Honeyman has also noted the incursion of the new-style multiple tailor to highly visible sites in the high streets of provincial towns and cities in the same period.<sup>47</sup>

This thesis argues that within this genre of shop, Simpsons was uniquely placed. Its more discreet back entrance in Jermyn Street connected with the network of traditional masculine consumption outlined in the previous pages. Its nearest neighbours were restaurants, bootmakers, tailors, the offices of solicitors and architects and residences of the well-to-do. This positioning, straddling the two very different routes, signified something specific in masculine consumption cultures.

The store's dual-entranced plan changed the way in which the plot 202 Piccadilly worked within the West End network through a process of reorientation. Simpsons occupied exactly the same long, narrow footprint as the previous occupant of the site: the Royal Geological Museum. However, the grand Piccadilly palazzo stone frontage had had no street access: the museum had turned its back on Piccadilly, its entrance being via the altogether quieter brick and stone frontage in the traditional male preserve of Jermyn Street. In contrast, Simpsons embraced what it found on the grander, busier street, without wanting to sever its links with the quieter one. Both worlds were encompassed in the new building, spatially organised so as to relate to the two different routes, as *Industrial Arts* reported, 'On the fourth floor are the work rooms of the tailors and cutters for the bespoke tailoring department, whose entrance is

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<sup>47</sup> Honeyman, 'Following Suit'.



at the Jermyn Street end of the building, and is lighted by large windows. At the Piccadilly end of this floor is the department for evening wear, artificially lighted.’<sup>48</sup>

The creation of a dual access also enabled the store’s internal circulation routes to tap directly into the street network, providing a direct cut-through from Piccadilly to Jermyn Street. Within this link, relationships between the old and new, the feminine and masculine could be renegotiated. It was this transformative capacity which differentiated this cut-through from Eagle Place just east of the store which made a similar spatial connection between Piccadilly and Jermyn Street. It also meant that it was different from the Piccadilly Arcade further West along Piccadilly, which housed traditional and primarily masculine businesses, maintaining continuity with rather than disrupting the old masculine shopping route as it jumped across Piccadilly between Jermyn Street and the Burlington Arcade.<sup>49</sup>

Positioning entrances on different streets in this way, although new for a West End man’s shop, was an established department store technique used to exploit the benefits to business of addressing different routes. Peter Jones for example, had entrances onto Sloane Square, Cadogan Gardens, Symons Street and Kings Road. Indeed, this explains the appeal to stores of acquiring a whole ‘island site’ bounded by streets, through the costly and piecemeal additions of plots. However ‘back’ entrances can also be interpreted in a different way. The balance between the different entrances and routes could be a shifting one. Debenhams, the successful department store, had always been in Wigmore Street, the quieter street running parallel with Oxford Street on the north side. During the 1930s, however, a number of major West End stores appeared to be reorienting their buildings away from the main thoroughfares and towards similar minor streets. For example, the first stage of the Oxford Street John Lewis’s rebuilding programme of 1937 was to create a prestige building addressing Cavendish Square. This was partly due to the protracted process of building up the island site, but by the time building work started, the remaining portion of the island addressing Oxford Street, the former D. H. Evans building, had already been purchased. This would seem to counter the importance of the arterial shopping routes outlined in this chapter, and can be read as a response to the disruption and chaos in these places, suggested by A. Trystan Edwards,

<sup>48</sup> *Industrial Arts*, Summer 1936, 93.

<sup>49</sup> *Kelly’s Post Office London Directory* of 1936 listed the businesses as Drew and Co. shirtmakers, Rumbold Jack and Co. sports warehouse, Leon L.K. and Co. Ltd. ophthalmic opticians, Steer Chas. hairdresser, Miss Mary Richards ladies’ outfitter, Roberts and Row Ltd. hosiers, Gill Leonard postage stamp dealer, Orick and Co. boot and shoe maker, Lansdowne F. leather goods maker, Herd and Walker Ltd. outfitters, Budd Ltd. shirt makers, Allen and Wright Ltd. tobacconists, Bayley F.O. Ltd. hosiers, Miss Lizzie Williams milliner, Miss H. Lilian florist.



Nothing is more tiring nor more discouraging to the would-be shopper than to be hustled by passers-by on a crowded pavement. It is notorious that Oxford Street and to a lesser extent Regent Street are losing their attractiveness owing to the discomfort experienced by pedestrians on the too narrow pavements, while more fortunate people who do their shopping by motor car find that there is insufficient room for vehicles to wait in the vicinity of the shops.<sup>50</sup>

The commentator's point about parking perhaps gets closest to the truth: stores apparently believed that the West End's street network was being transformed by car ownership. The Westwoods advised,

Proximity of squares where customers can park their cars is becoming increasingly important in site selection in central urban areas. ... Customers will patronize their shops where they can leave their cars even if it means travelling a greater distance to them. This is so important that at least one large London store has made arrangements with a near-by garage to park customers' cars free on production of a receipted bill.<sup>51</sup>

[Figures 4.3, 4.16] This suggestion of a perceived increase in shopping by car is borne out by store publicity, such as Liberty's Christmas catalogue of c.1939, and guides to parking in central London of this date. It is important not to overplay this point: it was a long time before national mall-incrusted shopping networks developed. The West End's arterial roads remained important shopping routes during the 1930s, but these new ways of thinking about store positioning would certainly have been uppermost in the minds of Simpsons' architect and owner.

Equal attention was given to controlling and encouraging flows of customers within the store interior.<sup>52</sup> Indeed routes, networks and motion were as fundamental to approaching the internal spaces of the department store as the streets outside. The issue of internal circulation was addressed in three primary ways: creating a network to join up the disparate elements within a department store; encouraging movement; and connecting up with the street outside. [Figure 4.17] All three were expressed in D. H. Evans published illustrations of the floor plans of its newly opened store, and it is clear from the store's opening press releases and the architect

<sup>50</sup> A Trystan Edwards, *The Architecture of Shops*, London: Chapman and Hall, 1933, 61.

<sup>51</sup> Bryan and Norman Westwood, *Smaller Retail Shops*, London: The Architectural Press, 1937, 17. Hammond clearly believes that shopping by car represented the way of the future, already being taken into account in North American retail design. A. Edward Hammond, *Multiple Shop Organisation*, London: Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons, 1930, 38.

<sup>52</sup> See the extensive professional literature on this subject, for example 'The Layout and Design of Departmental Store Fittings in relation to their uses', *RIBA Journal*, 5 September 1936, 1009-1026; Bryan and Norman Westwood, *Smaller Retail Shops*, London: The Architectural Press, 1937.



Louis Blanc's comments that routing was absolutely fundamental to the design of the building.<sup>53</sup>

The need to join up the disparate elements within a store was pressing. [Figure 4.18] A diagram of vertical circulation at Peter Jones shows how persuading customers to venture to the uppermost floor of the seven-story store might represent a significant problem. But Bowlby's suggestion of the department store's incoherence also had clear implications for circulation: 'the only characteristic unifying the goods in the store was that they were all for sale.'<sup>54</sup> Whilst she somewhat overstates the case, as much *did* link goods to the particular class and gender identity of stores, the need for customers to multi-purchase was certainly potentially undermined by the 'department' format. The task of store owners was to overlay the map of commodity organisation within the store with effective circulation routes. An article in the *Architectural Record* commented, 'Aisles and vertical circulation can be planned in such a way as to influence subconsciously the customer's path.'<sup>55</sup> The commentary reveals that these 'paths' not only link goods and departments, but suggested *particular* routes, encouraging exposure to carefully positioned displays. At Simpsons, attention to circulation was particularly important because of a belief that the ability to use routes within stores in a confident, fluid way related to gendered inclination to browse and indulge in temptation. This point was raised in *Art and Industry*'s review of Simpsons, 'I suggest that as a man (unlike a woman) shops with a definite article and price in mind, it is well to have legible signs at frequent intervals. As it is one wanders up and down the seven floors at Simpsons without any clear idea of where anything is.'<sup>56</sup> As this thesis explores, the success of stores like Simpsons suggested this model of masculine consumption practices was changing, and with it the functioning of internal routes and display. However correspondence between the store owner and architect reveals that such concerns were central in the design of the store.

The individual elements of the building related to circulation - stairs, light wells, escalators, lifts, entrances - were the often primary focus of the interior design and planning of stores. This is reflected in department store histories, although in these accounts the innovativeness of the features: notably steel, hydraulic, and glass technology, has often overshadowed the way they served the needs of circulation, and connectedly they have been read as symbols of

<sup>53</sup> See for example an account of Louis Blanc's discussion of the building at a DIA meeting, in the *Cabinet Maker*, 22 January, 1938.

<sup>54</sup> Bowlby, *Just Looking*, 3

<sup>55</sup> 'Retail Store Planning', *Architectural Record*, July 1935, 52.

<sup>56</sup> *Art and Industry*, July 1936, 21.



modernity rather than of movement.<sup>57</sup> The contemporary retail professional retail on the other hand prioritised the use of these elements to make circulation systems functional, visible and comprehensible. Mr Simpson wrote to his architect, 'A lot depends on the design of the staircase. The customer should be able to see the floor above - the distance made to look very short. In considering the above suggestion you might also reconsider your original idea of a centre well and staircase.'<sup>58</sup> These elements also created stages for movement within the building, encouraging circulation. [Figure 4.19] The dramatic escalator hall at D. H. Evans received considerable attention from the press. The design of escalators and their representation in advertisements evoked movement as well as facilitating. A store manager told the press, 'Although the escalators are remarkably quiet, they create a feeling of movement and life that sweeps the public up through the store'<sup>59</sup> [Figure 4.20] The same store exemplified the provision of rationally planned internal 'streets' which created uninterrupted vistas through each floor, creating visual connections between spaces and displaying the process of moving between. The publicity brochure of 1937 depicted these avenues filled with processing female customers.

[Figure 4.21] At this time the barriers between spaces required by fire regulations were a major hurdle to achieving transparency of circulation. Simpsons was planned to minimise the visual and physical interruption of such barriers to internal circulation. Rather than closing off the lift and stairs from the shop floor, which was normal practice, the impressive staircase was positioned prominently in the middle of the long west side of the building, and instead sliding room partitions were concealed within the walls of each floor.<sup>60</sup> The staircase was thus a highly visible symbol of movement: strategically-placed displays and the gleaming vertical chrome light fitting within the stairwell drew the eye upwards to where the floors above could be glimpsed.

[Figure 4.22] It is clear that the store's internal circulation system was intended to replicate the kineticism of the West End street as closely as possible. Indeed, drawing on developments within retail planning theory, efforts were made to make the store's circulation routes continuous with the network of shopping streets. Entrances were important in this respect: in their positioning, as discussed, but also their design. [Figure 4.23] The recessed entrance was a

<sup>57</sup> See for example Lancaster, *The Department Store*, Chapter 3.

<sup>58</sup> Letter from Alexander Simpson to Joseph Emberton 14 May 1935, Simpsons Archive.

<sup>59</sup> *Fur World*, 7 March, 1936.

<sup>60</sup> This aspect of the design was reported in *Industrial Arts*, Summer 1936, 93. Emberton had earlier made a case for the benefits of this method of handling fire regulations in an article 'Modern Store Design', *Specification*, 1932, 15, where he drew comparisons with the Wanamaker Building in Philadelphia.



key element of 1930s shop design, exemplified by Emberton's design for His Master's Voice in Oxford Street. During the planning stages, Mr Simpson toyed with the idea of an elliptical recessed entrance to draw customers in from the pavement before opting for a central entrance on the building line. Nonetheless, glazed doors allowed views into and out of the store, and were lined up with the ground floor's central corridor, and with the Jermyn Street entrance.<sup>61</sup> Similarly, *Women's Wear's* review of D. H. Evans commented on 'the ingenious and original planning of the ground floor, which has two brightly illuminated *shopping thoroughfares* [emphasis added] running from the Oxford Street frontage to the back of the building, and from the Old Cavendish Street frontage to the escalator hall, respectively.'<sup>62</sup>

The way in which buildings were required to work with external routes was actually quite complex. Simpsons, for example, was also required to relate to a system of goods delivery. Mr Simpson questioned his architect, 'Are you now satisfied that you have arrived at a thoroughly satisfactory method of bringing goods into the shop from the Jermyn Street entrance, taking them down to the store room in the basement and transferring them to the upper floors?'<sup>63</sup> The store also tapped in to commuter routes, complicated by the need to allow for future partial conversion to office use: 'On the assumption that the whole of the upper floors might be occupied by offices, would there be any difficulty in making an entrance to same in Piccadilly by an alteration to the shopfront and putting in lift accommodation or, alternatively, using the existing lifts that at present supply the shop?'<sup>64</sup>

Stores additionally exploited possibilities for creating underground links and bridges between buildings. Often this was a means for department stores to link the disparate plots that had been acquired on different sides of streets, as was the case with the Oxford Street John Lewis, which had two tunnels linking the blocks on either side of Holles Street during the 1930s. During the planning stages for Simpson Piccadilly the possibility was explored of a link being created at basement level with the neighbouring Lyons 'Popular Café', although this plan was eventually abandoned for unspecified reasons.<sup>65</sup>

Importantly, during the 1930s, radically new concepts of stores' relationships with routes and spatial planning were believed to represent the future of West End consumption cultures,

<sup>61</sup> Discussed in letters between Alexander Simpson and Joseph Emberton, 9 April 1935 and 4 August 1935, Simpsons Archive.

<sup>62</sup> *Women's Wear*, 4 March 1937.

<sup>63</sup> Letter from Alexander Simpson to Joseph Emberton, 20 May 1935, Simpsons Archive.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Letter from Alexander Simpson to Joseph Emberton, 9 July 1935. Simpsons Archive.



setting the tone for a series of significant, if unrealised, strategic plans for the area. Walter Gropius, iconic Modernist architect, advocated a completely new approach to store design and the shopping street, ‘If it were possible to get all the owners of the modern buildings in Oxford Street ... to agree to the construction of balconies and bridges, a new era in store building could commence, and one important phase of the traffic difficulty would be well on the way to being solved.’<sup>66</sup>

This case study has shown that routes and streets played a large part in how an individual store functioned within West End consumption cultures, and also that new stores could significantly affect the balance within the area’s shopping geographies. It has been an account that privileges the role of retailers as they skilfully positioned their stores and created internal pathways, but it has simultaneously drawn attention to their relationship with broader spatialised West End shopping cultures, historically rooted, and evolving, which retailers were powerless to control single-handedly.

### SHOPPING WITH *VOGUE*

Despite the incursions made by the newcomers, the sites of feminine consumption continued to dominate the spaces of the West End. This study suggests that patterns of feminine consumption in the West End, if more visible, were also more complex, as they were subject to swifter changes. There was a corresponding proliferation of guides and maps, which lacked obvious parallels in the world of masculine consumption. The detailed, regularly updated navigational aids to the West End provided by women’s magazines, newspapers and tourist guides mapped consumer cultures that were distinctly feminine. Whilst advertisements for menswear in newspapers can be seen to collectively constitute some sort of map, it was considerably less intelligible than its feminine counterpart. This suggests that masculine urban narratives of consumption worked differently, in less ‘written’ ways, necessitating approaching the previous case study through an examination of shop positioning and design.

[Figure 4.24] By the 1930s shopping content was an established component of magazine advice, particularly so for *Vogue* with its preoccupation with luxury, and specifically West End, consumption, epitomised in a 1939 cover depicting an exclusive milliner’s. Fashion

<sup>66</sup> Walter Gropius, ‘The Store of Tomorrow’, *Store*, April 1937, 119-200.



features, shopping advice columns and advertisements provided a monthly round-up of information on latest fashion developments and best buys. This case study considers *Vogue*'s micro-geographies of fashionability and consumption contained within this shopping information, as a means of exploring the West End and its consumers. It argues that it was not just the kind of goods promoted within the magazine, and the shop, but their precise West End location, which was important within feminine consumption cultures. Indeed, it is apparent that associations of location and the process of tracing a route of fashionable shopping through the West End, were both as important as what was actually bought. Thus these geographies structured West End consumption in complex ways, existing as a layer of memory attached to commodities after they were bought.

[Figure 4.25] *Vogue*'s shopping columns were a particularly important component. In the 1930s, *Vogue* launched a regular column called 'Shop-hound': each column an account of a fictional shopping trip conducted by a small, very fashionable, dog, who worked from the *Vogue*'s West End offices at 1 New Bond Street. These articles adopted the conventions of an established genre of fashion reportage in women's magazines, and were distinctively spatial: the goods were precisely located within the West End, and were described in the form of an actual shopping trip.<sup>67</sup> Each column expressed the connected nature of fashionability, commodity and place, mapping the important shopping sites. For example, a column of 1938 described a typical meandering shopping trip that was rooted in the principal shopping streets at the heart of the West End. Shop-hound first reported that tie-silks for jackets could be bought by the yard from Galeries Lafayette in Regent Street and Harrods Man's Shop in the Brompton Road, silk Petersham from Dickins and Jones in Regent Street. Then the hound confided a 'red hot tip for sports girls, country girls, all girls. Daks, the famous men's trousers from Simpsons, of Piccadilly, are now being made for women. Chief advantages: perfect cut, special gadget at the waist to ensure snug fit, single side zip fastening, legs with "cuffs". (Please note that cuffless trousers are dead as doormats).' Then the new 'sky-pink' lipstick from Elizabeth Arden in Bond Street was purchased, followed by Hawaiian necklaces from Fenwicks. Next she headed a little south to a decorator's in Eaton Terrace, as she had woken up 'the other day *hating* her house.' The trail ended with Easter eggs from Ginnett Flowers in Ellis Street and a quick visit to Florence Hills in Princes Street, Cavendish Square, 'a dressmaker who specialises in larger figures.'<sup>68</sup> It soon becomes apparent that whilst street

<sup>67</sup> Similar columns in Victorian and Edwardian women's magazines are described in Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*, 126-132, showing how this had become an established means of mapping out the feminine city.

<sup>68</sup> 'Shop-hound', *Vogue*, 13 April 1938, 84



directories provided a comprehensive picture of the makeup of particular streets, the magazine selected, filtered and commodified the city's streets. It still, however, preserved the all-important assemblage of elements which evoked the West End: the spoils of Shop-hound's trips were largely garments, but also included accessories, cosmetics, groceries, furniture and services such as dressmakers, laundries and beauticians. This study considers the way these individual elements were assembled for particular audiences in a spatial way within *Vogue*.

[Figure 4.26] Firmly located shopping routes were constructed through a sprinkling of well-known addresses, and the process of travelling between shops, which the columnist had undertaken by foot or with a chauffeured car, was written into the text and illustrated. In one column, Shop-hound described starting in Comach, a hat shop in Berkeley Square, where 'the sunshine is as pale, the windows as tall, the trees as graceful, as in Paris,' then 'passing on up the square, looking in at Clive Gardner's delicate water colours and violet hearts in a flower shop, Shop-hound mounted to find the flower hats and bouquets which Marjorie Castle will have, if anyone.' She advised, 'In the same beautiful square ... see also K. Fisher, that sensitive and intelligent person, who loves to design frocks for you specially ... Now turn the corner with Shop-hound into Bruton Street, and instead of letting your mouth vainly water outside Bendicks' tempting chocolate shop, go in and make an investment in Bittermints.'<sup>69</sup>

The practice of journeying through shopping areas has been established as a key element of modern consumer society, and indeed of urban life, as seen in the extensive literature on the *flâneur*, the *flâneuse* and, increasingly, the tourist. It would certainly seem that for *Vogue*, the location of shopping, and the process of tracing a route of fashionable shopping through the West End, were as important as what was actually bought. The columns carefully placed each garment within the setting of the shop, and each shop within its street context: this information was crucial to the identity of the commodity. It would also seem that expert shopping in the West End, as exemplified by the Shop-hound columnist, was characterised precisely by the activities of browsing, comparing and window-shopping, all processes which involved engagement with the shopping street.

The dual successive/cumulative reading of magazines was discussed in Chapter 2. Read in succession, the Shop-hound columns reveal an ongoing process of evolution within *Vogue*'s West End shopping geography. During the 1930s, no obvious or dramatic shifts of territory

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<sup>69</sup> *Vogue*, 4 March 1936, 18.



took place: no new thoroughfares were cut through the historic street layout of the West End, and there was no large-scale rebuilding of existing streets. However *Vogue* presented a picture of the subtle but significant reconfigurations in the map of fashionable consumption by reporting the arrival of a new shop, a new season's collections or merely a newly available pair of shoes. Read cumulatively and collectively, however, these columns sketched out a firmer shopping map for the *Vogue* reader, filtering the vast number of available shops and services, to provide a *Vogue*-approved territory. Cumulative reading was implicitly acknowledged by *Vogue* through the regular publishing of shopping directories.<sup>70</sup> [Figure 4.27] In 1937 when regular readers were issued with details of its featured businesses in an 'address book', designed to be kept in the handbag for reference.<sup>71</sup>

The shopping geography made apparent through such a cumulative reading is revealing. *Vogue* drew tight boundaries around its territory. The magazine clearly attached importance to the skill of seeking out the most desirable purchases in a number of stores in a relatively small geographical area. This was emphasised by Shop-hound's tongue-in-cheek directions for forays outside the boundaries. She warned, 'Hampstead may sound very far off the map'<sup>72</sup> and the Fulham Road was described as being 'on the very outskirts of civilisation.'<sup>73</sup> On recommending the Mortlake Cabinet and Joinery Company in Lower Richmond Road, Shop-hound reassured: 'you know, the way you go to Mid-Surrey Golf Club or the 'Varsity rugger match.'<sup>74</sup>

This was also a geography which selected particular elements from the network of consumption outlined earlier in the chapter, and readjusted the identity of particular streets within the reconstructed map. The foregrounding of the shopping thoroughfares: Regent Street, Oxford Street and Piccadilly, was linked to their position as luxury department store trails. Particular favourites of *Vogue* were Selfridges in Oxford Street, Dickens and Jones and Liberty's in Regent Street, and Simpsons and Fortnums in Piccadilly. The network of conspicuously positioned department stores was extended to the fringes of the West End, including Derry and Tom in Kensington High Street, Peter Jones in Sloane Square, Harrods and Harvey Nichols in Knightsbridge, collapsing the real distance between them, in the manner of imagined maps. The prominence of these thoroughfares within Shop-hound's map

<sup>70</sup> For example, such lists were published in 22 June 1938, 28 December 1938 and 12 July 1939.

<sup>71</sup> Advertised in *Vogue*, 14 April 1937, 64.

<sup>72</sup> 'Shop-hound', *Vogue*, 4 August 1937, 45.

<sup>73</sup> 'Shop-hound', *Vogue*, 24 July 1945, 54.

<sup>74</sup> 'Shop-hound', *Vogue*, 27 April 1938, 80.



was implicitly connected to the continued fashionability of the big London stores during the 1930s, unacknowledged by existing histories, which have often been distracted by newer formats. In contrast, *Vogue* reported the continued expansion of existing stores and the establishment of new ones in this period, and plainly celebrated the kinds of shopping practices they housed. The famous department stores were ultimately presented as an absolutely necessary component of the shopping map, Shop-hound claiming it, ‘unthinkable to visit the Brompton Road and not Harrods.’<sup>75</sup> This continued popularity and fashionability of the big stores was also suggested in other sources. A director of Harrods specifically pointed to the scale and extensive stock of this retail model by way of explanation: ‘There is a glamour about the large store which specially appeals to shoppers ... It is now an epitome of the world's merchandise, a universal exhibition, where the newest colour, the latest style, the newest vogue in decoration or in furnishings may be seen; the store is, in fact, a reflection on the many changing phases of life and fashion.’<sup>76</sup> This is highly significant, demanding a reassessment of the structure of the fashionable shopping landscape in inter-war Britain. As Lawrence Neal concluded: ‘if success can be regarded as a criterion of efficiency, it is significant that since the time of the post-war slump up to the commencement of the existing depression, the leading departmental stores have been able to report almost uninterrupted progress, and this in spite of falling prices, unemployment and general industrial depression.’<sup>77</sup>

But it was the exclusivity of smaller streets like Grosvenor Street Wigmore Street, Bruton Street and, above all, Bond Street, that attracted Shop-hound the most. She wrote, ‘However one looks at the snobbish question of district, address and reputations, it is no good blinking at the fact that we are fatally influenced by goods bought in “Bond Street”, “in Mayfair” or its purlieus.’<sup>78</sup> Shop-hound revelled in the designer salons, chic dress shops, milliners, jewellers and florists, as well as the more upmarket dressmakers. As they were slightly off the beaten track, *Vogue* could claim to be the keeper of the essential urban knowledge by revealing their whereabouts. The appeal of these shops was dual, and contradictory. On one hand they were positioned within a long tradition of elite West End consumption, their marketing strategies emphasising qualities such as ‘timelessness’ and ‘pedigree’ in order to distinguish themselves from the *arriviste*, showy stores of Oxford Street. This characteristic was frequently singled out by London guides for comment, for example H. V. Morton’s guide noted, ‘There is a pleasing, old-fashioned air about it, due in some measure to its provision shops, with their

<sup>75</sup> ‘Shop-hound’, *Vogue*, 16 September 1936, 90.

<sup>76</sup> Frank Chitham and S. A. Williams, *Principles of Store Practice*, London: Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons, 1932, 2.

<sup>77</sup> Lawrence E. Neal, *Retailing and the Public*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1932, 20.

<sup>78</sup> ‘Shop-hound’, *Vogue* 19 August 1936.



game, fish, and other foods. In no other street in London are Stilton cheeses and pearl necklaces in such friendly proximity.’<sup>79</sup> On the other hand, the very exclusivity of the goods, and the highly fashionable elite cultures with which they were associated, suggested limited runs and availability. Shop-hound’s very *raison d’être* was to report and celebrate a model of consumption whose status was assured by an established history, but whose specific fashions were fleeting.

Shop-hound also promoted an additional community of businesses, located in the upper storeys and less-salubrious back streets, and which made themselves known in the small ads at the back of the magazine. They were less glamorous elements, but essential for the maintenance of fashionable urban femininity,

All together, girls - Shop-hound would like to give three loud barks and have you join in the cheering for ‘the little people’. ... those chaps you and I and all good shoppers have a passion for collecting. You know them – the ‘little’ man who does such wonders with slip covers ‘at a price’ - the ‘little woman’ who runs you up a frock in no time. Hound after spending the last fortnight tracking down a few of these treasures, now spills the beans and tells you where to find them.<sup>80</sup>

This drew on the classified section in the back pages, which were hidden in the real street scene: the dressmakers, fur cleaners, manicurists and dress agencies on the fringes, backstreets and upper storeys.<sup>81</sup> Trade directories reveal the extent of this community: the upper floors of 41 Bond Street alone were an electrotherapist, a masseuse, a chiropodist, milliner, school of dance, gown shop, photographer and permanent complexion tinting company. Indeed the West End’s shopping streets hid a vast range of business: above Gay’s fancy leather goods at 93 Regent Street was Va-Per-Marcel Ltd permanent hair-waving appliance manufacturers, above the Quadrant Arcade was Janis Agency, film casting agents and above an Oxford Street’s Swan fountain pen shop was Barnard and Howarth detective agency.<sup>82</sup>

The measure of geographical obscurity, in line with the rarity of particular goods and services themselves, accentuated *Vogue*’s labelling of its map as indispensable. The presence of this complex map of ‘little people’ in *Vogue* further problematises a view of the magazine’s shopping geography dictated straightforwardly by more powerful advertisers. It also suggests the existence of a shopping network which blurred in places with networks of production: a

<sup>79</sup> H. V. Morton, *London: A Guide*, London: Methuen 1937.

<sup>80</sup> ‘Shop-hound’, *Vogue*, 3 August 1938, 48.

<sup>81</sup> See for example ‘*Vogue*’s Address Book’ in *Vogue*, 16 March 1938.

<sup>82</sup> *Kelly’s Post Office London Directory*, 1936.



large number of London's small clothing manufacturers and 'sweaters' were situated in Soho and in the area north of Oxford Street.<sup>83</sup>

There were other networks, for example those of couture, land ownership and tourism: all of which were positioned differently within local, national and international networks. For example, the shopping map overlapped with a more elite West End map of fashion houses. The following *Vogue* article described London as a fashion city, 'A tense atmosphere ... pervades the West End. The very air announces that something important is about to happen. For, behind the hushed doors of Bruton, Grosvenor, Regent and Bond streets, the new spring clothes are being born.'<sup>84</sup> The article plotted the positions of several designers: including Madame Isobel in Regent Street, Norman Hartnell and Victor Stiebel in Bruton Street, Enos in Mount Street and Digby Morton in Palace Gate. The haute couture city overlapped with the shopping city to a considerable degree. Designer clothes may have been more expensive, but the positioning of fashion houses cheek-by-jowl with retailers within the West End's streets, and Shop-hound's descriptions of trips to the West End outlets of small-scale London dress and hat designers within her shopping column show that the distinction between salon and boutique was not a clear one.

A study of *Vogue* shows how even within a single magazine, the West End's identity could be multiple; a hub of fashion, of entertainment as well as different kinds of shopping. These different identities were mapped individually through the text, creating overlapping networks within the collective narrative of fashionable urban life. They reveal that the magazine offered a picture of West End shopping which was accessible on several levels. Rather than taking Shop-hound's round up as a blue print for a shopping trip, a visit could be constituted differently by every reader according to income, class and fashionability.

Despite the ostensibly coherent *Vogue* geography, the different sections can be read separately creating a fractured map. Even the shopping geography could be read as multiple, differentiated according to different groups of readers. The full-page prestige advertisements and shopping columns marked out the West End's main feminine shopping arteries, whereas the shopping columns favoured the small exclusive shops of Bond Street. *Vogue* classified's 'little people', read in isolation, created alternative, cheaper geography. Consumer identities

<sup>83</sup> This manufacturing landscape is described in Christopher Breward, *Fashioning London: Clothing and the Modern Metropolis*, Oxford: Berg, 2004, 102-105.

<sup>84</sup> *Vogue* (London), 23 January 1935, 43.



that negotiated and resisted the dominant geography of *Vogue* are examined in greater detail in Chapter 14.

Reading *Vogue*'s shopping columns in conjunction with the study of Simpsons reveals the extent of the urban editing processes taking place in the construction of West End maps. Hadlaw has usefully suggested of the London Underground map, "reading" the Underground map relies on the possession of particular knowledges of modernity and urbanity. ... The Underground riders of 1933 were able to make sense of the map not because they were versed in the shorthand of information design, but rather because both map and riders shared a common sensibility.<sup>85</sup> This thesis argues that the kind of cartographic, textual, and imagined shopping maps constructed during the 1930s are equally aligned with the consumer cultures they plotted, and that the West End's various maps can be used to draw conclusions about different kinds of consumers and shopping practices.

*Vogue*'s map of the West End was clearly gendered, tracing the footsteps of a female shopper who strode confidently the West End's streets, unchaperoned and well informed. [Figure 4.28] This picture was in line with images of her elsewhere, including store and transport advertising. Collectively, these sources documented an important development in urban femininity, when placed in the context of the history of women and the city outlined in Chapter 2. It would seem that her presence no longer aroused intense anxiety about women's physical and moral safety within the city, or about the changing, less domestic, nature of femininity itself, as it had in the narratives of Victorian and Edwardian London. [Figure 4.29] Her 'safe' engagement with the West End was no longer confined to the protected interior of the department store, a semi-private space promoted by nineteenth-century department store owners as a 'home from home', through the provision of restrooms, tea-rooms and the like.<sup>86</sup> In *Vogue*'s West End, women were dominant, as suggested by Jaeger's advertising campaign, and men were apparently absent.

This study does not suggest however that the relationship between gender and the city had become neutral: the contrived absence of West End men within narratives of the West End could be read as a profound uneasiness about the new kinds of masculine consumers. The previous case study showed how shopping routes were confusingly bleeding into each other, as new-style man's shops established a foothold in the main thoroughfares of feminine

<sup>85</sup> Hadlaw, 'The London Underground Map', 26.

<sup>86</sup> Discussed in Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*, Chapter 1.



consumption, adopting characteristics of the department stores. It would seem that for *Vogue* this was an unwelcome intrusion. It is however notable that whilst both traditional and new masculine consumers were rendered largely invisible by *Vogue*'s filter, a reciprocal infiltration by feminine consumers of the *spaces* of masculine consumption was a recurrent theme in the magazine. *Vogue* reported on these spatial developments in 1937, 'Shop-hound has never dared to hope that Beale and Inman would ever cater for the mere woman; those sacred Bond Street portals were exclusive to the sterner sex. But this almost sacrosanct atmosphere of impeccable tailoring has been transferred intact to their new branch for "the likes of us" at 80 Grosvenor Street.'<sup>87</sup>

[Figure 4.30] When Simpsons had opened in 1936, it had styled itself the first department store exclusively for men. However, a women's department opened in 1937. *Vogue*'s shopping map adjusted accordingly, seemingly oblivious to the problems this caused for these men's shops, whose legitimisation of new masculine shopping cultures depended on labelling these shops as separate, masculine spaces, as is explored later in the thesis. The geography was adopted, but the masculine consumer written out. In a 1939 shopping article, Simpsons was perused as if it were tailored to her feminine needs,

Simpson's of Piccadilly manage to be most things to all women, despite the fact that they cater largely for men. Women's fashions are on one floor, which makes accessory-matching an easy, intimate affair. There's an inexpensive, quick snack bar in the basement – also a theatre ticket office and travel bureau. If you have a car, the commissionaire will see that it's parked and back again at the door when needed – free of charge.<sup>88</sup>

These incursions made into masculine territory relate to American *Vogue*'s description of the essential masculinity and 'tailored' nature of women's fashion cultures in 1930s London. British *Vogue*'s approach was also evidence of women's confident appropriation of urban commercial spaces during the thirties, and equally of the collapsing of boundaries between the West End's feminine and masculine shopping practices in this period. This collapse was certainly significant, but was also partial and highly problematic for both sides. *Vogue* did not represent the West End as a place for exciting encounters with the opposite sex: for the magazine this was not what a woman's urban experience was about. The absence of references

<sup>87</sup> 'Shop-hound', *Vogue*, 18 August 1937, 50.

<sup>88</sup> 'Labour Saving Shopping for the Woman up in Town', *Vogue*, 23 August 1939.



to the world of masculine consumption in *Vogue* suggests a desire to protect the femininity of the magazine, but also of the West End within the otherwise masculine city.<sup>89</sup>

*Vogue*'s safe, feminine version of the West End filtered out danger and vice because of its temporal positioning. Its complex shopping timetables and itineraries for its unaccompanied female shoppers, contained in articles such as 'Eight Hour Day in Town' and the Shop-hound columns, intersected with London's own daily cycle. The theme of temporal duality of London's populations and its geography was a popular topic for 1930s guidebooks, relating to the literature on the fleeting modern city outlined in Chapter 2. *The Magic of London* informed its readers of this flux:

At night London changes ... Piccadilly becomes the bright centre of life. Enormous crowds congest its pavements: slow moving crowds, looking for amusement, for adventure. The theatres open; the brilliant restaurants are ablaze with light; the cars and taxis hum past with parties for a theatre or a dance. The stranger will drift with the human tide, observing the strange variety of it, the men and women of all nations who have a place in it ...<sup>90</sup>

*London the Wonder City* also drew attention to the complexity of London's shifting maps, 'certain times of day have to be seized in order to see them at their best advantage, such as the noonday shopping cavalcade in the West End, afternoon on the River, and evening at one of the scores of theatres or hotels.'<sup>91</sup> [Figure 4.31] Guidebooks would often provide several maps of the West End to mark on these various routes.

Nead and Schlör have suggested that cities worked differently at night, when different narratives of danger come into play.<sup>92</sup> Parts of the West End, notably the area around Piccadilly and Shepherds market, were well-known sites of prostitution. [Figure 4.32] Gaunt's commentary *London Promenade* played on this theme, depicting a community of prostitutes hovering outside a draper's window in Wardour Street after dark.<sup>93</sup> Nead and Schlör claim that street lighting and policing policies were aspects of a drive towards 'security' that was a defining aspect of the modern city. Urban narratives of the magazine or guidebook could equally create perceptions of safety, exploiting the fact that this map of vice was highly temporal, filtering out the night. Night-time London *was* sometimes acknowledged as an

<sup>89</sup> This relates to a discussion of the magazine as a traditionally 'feminised space' in Beetham, *A Magazine of her own?*, 3.

<sup>90</sup> *The Magic of London: Guide to London and Round About*, Southern Railway of England and Great Western Railway of England, 1931, 11.

<sup>91</sup> *London: the Wonder City*, the Pullman Car Company, 1937, 7.

<sup>92</sup> Nead, *Victorian Babylon*, Chapter 2; Schlör, *Nights in the Big City*, 20, 57.

<sup>93</sup> William Gaunt, *London Promenade*, London: The Studio, 1930, 20.



entertainment area, and was portrayed as exciting and accessible for women. However, the more worrying elements were written out, and it was assumed that women would have a suitable male escort. A report in the *Evening Standard* shows that female shoppers were prepared to defend this image of a safe daytime shopping territory, 'A crowd of shoppers chased a suspect across Brompton Road, S.W., today. The fugitive, it is alleged, snatched some articles from a stand in Harrod's Stores and ran away. A man was detained in Tullet's Yard, a stable, and taken to Walton Street Police Station.'<sup>94</sup>

*Vogue's* version of the West End was also strongly class-inflected, depicting shopping streets peopled by the affluent middle classes. Chapter 3 noted that magazines aimed at the lower-middle and working-class market such as *Home Chat* and *Woman* paid little attention to West End shopping. The *Daily Mail's* shopping map provides a useful comparison. This was a national paper addressing the broad lower-middle class, self-consciously modern and embracing consumption and femininity.<sup>95</sup> [Figure 4.33] The prominent advertising by West End retailers filling the front page attests to the currency of the West End in this context, but it was a very different West End from that drawn by *Vogue*. The exclusive Bond Street shops were nowhere to be seen. The prestige department stores, Harrods, Selfridges, Simpsons, Derry and Toms, were included, but their advertisements different significantly from those placed in *Vogue*. In the illustrated example, Selfridge's did not advertise its designer ball gowns, but rather its 'price demonstration sale in the great bargain basement.'<sup>96</sup> The sites were clearly working simultaneously in several different class registers, positioning themselves within various routes. An advertisement in American *Vogue* for Queen Quality shoes painted just such a picture of the trajectories of different shoppers overlapping for a moment on the shop floor:

Miss Nona C ... has just 'come out.' She dresses charmingly, but within her allowance. Miss Marjorie W ... entered a decorator's shop four years ago. She looks smart always; yet she pays her own way in the world. Their fashion needs are different; very probably their paths will never cross. But both of them found their spring shoe wardrobes among the lovely designs of Queen Quality.<sup>97</sup>

The *Daily Mail* also included the less exclusive community of West End shops whose strong foothold in Oxford Street was noted earlier. At 71-77 Oxford Street was the showy new

<sup>94</sup> *Evening Standard*, 10 January 1930, 1.

<sup>95</sup> Deborah Ryan, *The Ideal Home through the Twentieth Century*, London: Hazar, 1997, 9.

<sup>96</sup> Advertisement for Selfridge's, *Daily Mail*, 27 April 1936, front page.

<sup>97</sup> Advertisement for Queen Quality, *Vogue* (New York), 12 April 1930, adjacent to p. 17.



Drages furniture store of 1930, a ‘munificent store for the service of that increasingly exuberant pair, Mr and Mrs Everyman.’<sup>98</sup> [Figure 4.34] In 1936, Drages held an advertising campaign in the paper that humorously represented its target audience. ‘Two young things’ Mr and Mrs Everyman begged their sales assistant, ‘Don’t lead us into extravagance, Jane,’ and were delighted with the safety-net of an instalment payment system. This was an alternative West End shopping route, coined by Alexander ‘the Mecca of fashion for the working girl, site of her much-vaunted new affluence’.<sup>99</sup> This West End was positioned within a different international network in which Hollywood took precedence over Paris.<sup>100</sup> *Vogue*’s Shop-hound passed these shops by without a second glance, suggesting the magazine’s uneasiness about the existence of this lower-middle and working-class ‘other’ in the territory of the West End, an issue explored further in Part IV.

The structure and text of London guidebooks also implicitly mapped the city in a different way from *Vogue*. They included the shopping streets as an integral part of this tourist territory. Some guides plotted the West End’s shopping routes on special fold-out plans highlighting notable shops, for example a *British Empire Exhibition* souvenir booklet of 1924 included West End shopping map as one of several themed street plans provided for tourists.<sup>101</sup> [Figure 4.3] Other guidebook maps flagged up individual shops as landmarks within a broader tourist landscape. The *Daily Sketch*’s plan of central London overlaid a whole series of information on a single map, differently colour coding hotels and restaurants, shops, clubs, cinemas, embassies, tube stations and heritage sites.<sup>102</sup> Thus, shopping infused maps of tourist London, helping to dictate its dimensions and key sites. Plotting a tourist map for tourists could also significantly skew the way the West End was imagined, shifting the relationships between shops and other sites. [Figure 4.35] For example, an early post-war guide to Simpsons included a map of central London rotated through 180 degrees, deliberately placing the shop in the context of other tourist sights such as Buckingham Palace and the Houses of Parliament.<sup>103</sup>

Other guides created imagined maps of the West End’s shopping streets through their text. Some merely provided directories of shops and their addresses, filtering the city to provide

<sup>98</sup> *The Architect and Building News*, 9 January 1931, 81

<sup>99</sup> Alexander, ‘Becoming a Woman’, 221.

<sup>100</sup> It is worth noting however that Horwood has questioned the importance of the American influence on taste within this group, in comparison with royalty and society. Catherine Horwood, ‘*Keeping Up Appearances*’: *Clothes, Class and Culture 1918-1939*, Unpublished PhD thesis, Royal Holloway, University of London, 2003, 34.

<sup>101</sup> The ‘*London at a glance*’ *British Empire Exhibition Souvenir Booklet*, 1924.

<sup>102</sup> *The Daily Sketch New Visitors’ and Motorists’ Plan of Central London*, 1927.

<sup>103</sup> Publicity leaflet, c.1950s, Simpsons Archive.



only the most prestigious or famous shops.<sup>104</sup> *London: What to See and Where to Stay* conveyed more of the texture of the shopping map by dividing London's shops into key areas; the cluster around Oxford Street, Piccadilly and Bond Street; Holborn; Kensington High Street; Brompton Road; and Bayswater.<sup>105</sup> It is important to note that each guide drew the map slightly different. For example, *The London Guide*'s territory was outlined:

The main shopping centres in London are as follows:- Oxford Street; New Oxford Street and Holborn; Bond Street, Regent Street, Piccadilly and Coventry Street; Brompton Road, Knightsbridge; Kensington High Street; Queens Road and Westbourne Grove, Bayswater; Wigmore Street, Victoria Street and Strand. Here will be found the large stores and the smaller, yet well known specialised shops and 'chain' stores, extending along the main thoroughfares and adjacent streets.<sup>106</sup>

It has been shown, then, that not only was each fleeting catalogue of commodities in Shop-hound's shopping columns specific to the fashionable shopping cultures of 1930s *Vogue*, but that the particular way relationships between fashionability, commodity and place were drawn in these columns provided a distinctive reading of the city. *Vogue*'s Shop-hound articulated the connected themes of fashion and shopping in a powerfully spatial manner. These columns suggest that it was the configuring and reconfiguring of fashions, commodities, shops and streets into routes and shopping trips which structured the urban narrative in the text and constructed an imagined West End. This accords with the conclusions of this chapter that the West End was a place where different gender and class identities were constructed, expressed and 'performed' through the tracing of particular shopping routes. The argument is that within consumption cultures, this spatial performance was as important as the purchase of particular commodities.

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Part I informs the thesis as a whole about the gendered and class-inflected nature of cities, the role of the street within consumption practices, the expression of modernity through the street network and the role of the street in retail design in the period. Particularly, location and networks have been proposed as crucial means of understanding historical retail and shopping cultures. Whereas nineteenth-century department stores have been studied in terms of 'urbanity' and post-war shopping's association with the out-of-town site and suburb has been discussed, the complex geographies involved in inter-war shopping have hitherto been almost

<sup>104</sup> See for example the list of principal department stores provided by *The Sights of London*, Dollond and Aitchison c.1930.

<sup>105</sup> *London: What to See and Where to Stay: The Official Guide of the Residential Hotels and Caterers Association*, 1930, 48-49.

<sup>106</sup> *The London Guide*, London: The Automobile Association, 1934.



entirely overlooked. This study has revealed both the close association of shopping cultures with the streets of the West End and the broader networks that it was part of. It has also suggested that shopping geographies constantly evolved, linked to the fleeting nature of consumption cultures themselves. It has stressed how nuanced changes within configurations of networks and routes contributed to and reflected significant transformations in shopping practices and conceptions of the urban. Thus the shopping geographies of the West End can be used as a means of interpreting consumption cultures specific to the 1930s.

Part I has challenged notions of a shopping geography made of discrete districts for different groups of consumers, instead suggesting a much more fluid picture where routes could be constituted differently according to class and gender, and could overlap, or be reconfigured as the nature of West End consumption changed. This study has also highlighted how the internal spatial arrangements of cities and positioning within broader national and international networks to be found within urban narratives was highly dependent on the class, gender and nationality of the audience. Thus the useful concept of ‘imagined city’ has been introduced, which will be explored further in Part IV.

The most important conclusion of this reassessment of inter-war West End shopping cultures is that this was far from being a period of decline and of preparation for the exodus of customers and businesses from the city centre. On the contrary, the 1930s West End has been shown as an important hub of national fashionable consumption, and the big stores remained an important element in this success. When compared with the picture of the nineteenth and early twentieth-century West End provided by Breward, Hobhouse, Rappaport and others, it appears to be the territory of more confident and plentiful feminine consumers, occupied with navigating their way through its complexities. They were joined by a community of newly mainstream masculine consumers, spilling over the demarcated boundaries of their own map.

The study certainly acknowledges the development of chain stores, nationally advertised brands and mail order, which contributed to the construction of other kinds of national shopping networks with a multitude of suburban and provincial nodes, and even more virtual networks that resisted association with more precise geographical location. The argument is rather that at this time such networks operated *alongside* another, still potent, network of fashionable, metropolitan consumer cultures that centred on the West End. These dual trends of suburbanisation and recentralisation were a feature of commercial life and were indeed



noted by the Greater London Regional Planning Committee in its report of 1933.<sup>107</sup> In the 1930s, the question of the future of British shopping geographies was far from settled. Indeed, invocation of the West End as a place was one of the most important tools in the hands of West End businesses enabling them to stand their ground. The continued importance of the area will be explored further in terms of its architecture, display cultures and consumer identities in the following chapters.

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<sup>107</sup> *Second Report of the Greater London Regional Planning Committee*, March 1933, 58.



## II

# MODERN SHOPS: BUILDING THE WEST END



## 5.

### INTRODUCTION II

Business buildings dominate our towns and cities, and shopfronts are the most conspicuous parts of many business buildings.

(A. Edward Hammond, 'Multiples and Amenities', *Commercial Art*, February 1930, 60.)

Part II is concerned with the retail architecture that shaped the modern city. The built fabric of the West End's shopping areas was fundamental to its consumption cultures: housing and staging shopping practices and commodities, bounding shopping streets, configuring routes. Not only did retail architecture dominate the West End street scene, it was an especially important part of cultural life during the 1930s, as Stamp explains, 'the 1930s was the last time when architecture was truly popular in this country. Most newspapers ... had a regular architectural correspondent and big new buildings were regarded as objects of public interest.'<sup>1</sup> Part II considers the place of retail architecture and the process of building in the evolving identities of the West End's shopping streets and of individual stores.

[Figures 5.1 and 5.2] The focal point of Part II is a case study of the new Simpsons and Peter Jones retail buildings of 1936. Both caught the attention of the popular and professional architectural press, and were symbolic of different aspects of the new consumer cultures with which this thesis is concerned. *The Scotsman* wrote of Simpsons,

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<sup>1</sup> Gavin Stamp, introduction to Gavin Stamp, (ed.), *AD Profile 24: Britain in the Thirties*, London: Architectural Design, 1979, 4.



‘the building is an expression in every way of the modern spirit.’<sup>2</sup> With its smooth stone skin, horizontal glazing bands and cutting-edge lighting and signage, it was stylish, eye-catching and certainly Modern. It was built from scratch as a brand new retail project, the result of a unique collaboration between Alexander Simpson, rising star of menswear manufacturing, and Joseph Emberton, Modernist architect with special expertise in ‘leisure architecture’: shops, exhibitions and funfairs. Together, they created a building tailored to fit a new kind of Englishman: the ‘Simpsons man’. Peter Jones was designed primarily by young architect William Crabtree for John Lewis, and was equally dramatic and Modern; with its curved building line and skin of glass. This time the project was for an established store which had built up a reputation within its largely female market for straightforwardness and good value.

This case study provides a starting point for a broader examination of the relationship between architecture and retail in the 1930s West End. Part II is concerned with a moment when shopping became associated with Modern architecture through a profusion of important landmark buildings within the West End; not only Simpsons in Piccadilly, and Peter Jones in Sloane Square, but also the new John Lewis, D. H. Evans, Marks and Spencer in Oxford Street, Barkers and Derry and Toms in Kensington High Street, and a multitude of smaller shops and shopfronts throughout the area.

Chapter 6 positions the Modern shop within the street scene, looking at the scale and patterns of rebuilding in the West End. Reading consumption cultures through its rebuilding programmes reveals that the 1930s was a time of important retail expansion and confidence, with a particular premium attached to design, contributing to the reassessment of the importance of metropolitan shopping at this time, outlined in Part I. The vibrant but piecemeal rebuilding during the 1930s reveals a resurgence of West End shopping in which retailers, rather than landowners or master-planners directed the fabric of the city. This piecemeal rebuilding in the Modern style reflected a particular kind of modernity, revealing tensions and dialogue between the old and the new West End.

Chapter 7 argues for the pivotal role of shops within the story of British Modernism. Through rebuilding projects such as Simpsons and Peter Jones, a particular brand of Modernism made a permanent impact on the West End. The chapter examines the complex

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<sup>2</sup> *The Scotsman*, 4 May, 1936.



relationship between architecture and retail, providing an additional dimension to existing studies of the relationship between gender and architecture. Spectacle, surface, advertising, femininity, novelty fashion and dress - pivotal elements within consumption cultures - were deeply problematic for many Modern architects and theorists. This chapter reads the contours of this relationship from the built environment of the West End, and also from the Modernist theoretical texts underpinning 1930s architectural practice, the professional architectural periodical press, the records of store management and more public venues such as exhibitions and newspapers.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Histories of architecture and shopping have both hitherto largely overlooked the subject of retail architecture. Part II interrogates the reasons for this omission and reveals the subject as a rich seam for both disciplines, whilst remaining mindful of the arguments about the importance of the geographies of consumption outlined in Part I. British architecture and design of the 1930s, particularly the Modern Movement, has been written about extensively, in a manner that has contributed to a fetishisation of the era and its style. This work, although frequently addressing a breadth of visual cultures, has paid scant attention to retail design and architecture, which this thesis argues held a pivotal place in cultural life.<sup>3</sup> Part II considers how the lack of serious historical study of retail architecture of this or indeed any period reflects a historical denigration of this building type within the architectural discourse, due to its associations with the commercial and the ephemeral.

Monographs of architects who have worked in the retail genre provide one model for discussing retail architecture, although the bulk of this work reflects an entrenched way of writing architectural history that prioritises issues of authorship and technical analysis over cultural and social significance.<sup>4</sup> Morrison's recent overview of English shop architecture through the ages has placed retail architecture more firmly on the agenda, but by necessity

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, David Dean, *The Thirties: Recalling the English Architectural Scene*, London: Trefoil in association with Royal Institute of British Architects Drawings Collection, 1983; James Peto and Donna Loveday (eds.), *Modern Britain 1929 – 1939*, London: The Design Museum, 1999; Stamp, *Britain in the Thirties*.

<sup>4</sup> See for example, Calladine, ' "A Paragon of Lucidity and Taste" ', 7-28; Rosemary Ind, *Emberton*, London and Berkeley: Scolar Press, 1983. James's work on Mendelsohn can be seen as an exception within this genre. Kathleen James, *Erich Mendelsohn and the Architecture of German Modernism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.



lacks detail, and fails to provide the new insights into the role of architecture within shopping cultures invited by the rich source material used.<sup>5</sup>

A few exceptional, directed studies have shown the usefulness of using studies of architecture and of construction programmes to inform shopping history, reading aspects of particular consumer cultures from the buildings. For Michael Miller, French department store architecture between 1869 and 1920 reflected the new cultures of the bourgeoisie.<sup>6</sup> Rappaport demonstrates study how retail architecture was used to control flourishing early twentieth century consumer cultures which were seen as ‘vulgar’ and feminine, and to assert the dominance of masculine, Imperial values during the rebuilding of Regent Street.<sup>7</sup> James has suggested that Messel’s early twentieth century architecture for the Berlin Wertheim store attempted to appease the established interests, denying modern consumer cultures and aligning itself with traditional national architecture, whereas Mendelsohn’s inter-war retail architecture related directly to shopping, emphasising the democratic, mass-produced nature of commodities, drawing references from the factory rather than the palace, in a way that was implicitly threatening to the status quo in Germany.<sup>8</sup> Siry’s work on the American store Carson Pirie Scott in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries tells the story of a store through its building programmes, each stage reflecting shifts in consumer culture.<sup>9</sup> However, excepting Siry’s useful research, existing works have failed to fully address stores in the context of the street scene: thus these studies of isolated businesses are not especially enlightening on the role that shops played as the built fabric of cities, defining a district and shaping its routes and shopping practices. Conversely, the studies of retail building which *have* engaged with cities and with the street have usually lacked analysis of architectural style in terms of its symbolic value, focussing rather on spatial qualities.<sup>10</sup>

Returning to retail and shopping histories: within the linear, celebratory tales of traditional store histories, architecture has figured variously as a marker of success, progress and zeitgeist, although there has been little in the way of more complex analysis of its

<sup>5</sup> Kathryn Morrison, *English Shops and Shopping: an Architectural History*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003.

<sup>6</sup> He writes, ‘it brought together the culture’s commitment to functionalize its environment and the culture’s irrepressible need to secure solidity and respectability for its works.’ Miller, *The Bon Marche*, 3.

<sup>7</sup> Rappaport, ‘Art, Commerce, or Empire?’, 98.

<sup>8</sup> James, ‘From Messel to Mendelsohn’.

<sup>9</sup> Joseph Siry, *Carson Pirie Scott: Louis Sullivan and the Chicago Department Store*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.

<sup>10</sup> See for example Longstreth, *City Centre to Regional Mall*; Longstreth, *The Drive-in*; Rendell, *The Pursuit of Pleasure*. Again, Siry’s study constitutes an exception. Siry, *Carson Pirie Scott*.



meaning.<sup>11</sup> Despite the frequent preoccupation of more academic shopping histories with the urban, outlined in Chapter 2, limited attention has been paid to the actual physical fabric of the city, the focus rather on consumer identities and the business of selling.<sup>12</sup> Consideration of the building has figured most prominently in studies of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century arcade<sup>13</sup> and, even more so, the late nineteenth-century department store. Following the agenda set by Zola's *Au Bonheur des Dames*, subsequent historical accounts have highlighted evolutions of architecture and building technology: plate-glass windows and electric lighting which maximised the potential of displays; lifts and escalators which aided circulation; steel frames which freed large expanses of shop floor from inconvenient partitions. This work pays some attention to the use of eye-catching architecture for promotional purposes, but fails to explore in depth the connections between architectural style and the modes of consumption of fashionable goods. While these cannot simply be read off each other, they were clearly interconnected, particularly so considering the close relationship between architect and fashion entrepreneur during the 1930s. This thesis seeks to address this failure to provide an integrated view of spatial and stylistic aspects of retail architecture. This omission is surprising given that consumption studies *have* addressed the visual nature of consumption cultures, for example the large body of work on display, the spectacular, and the *flâneur* and window-shopper's gaze discussed in Part III. Thus an artificial divide has been created between the design of external architecture, interiors, displays and commodities. This study has attempted to show the entanglement of these things within West End cultures of consumption in the 1930s.

This study also engages with ideas about the symbolic nature of architecture and its advertising potential. In this respect it draws on work which has begun to reassess the relationship between architecture, design and the commercial during the inter-war period, notably Colomina's *Privacy and Publicity*, which argues that Modern architecture's very

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<sup>11</sup> See Asa Briggs, *The Centenary History of Lewis's*, London: Batsford 1956; Sean Callery, *Harrods Knightsbridge: The Story of Society's Favourite Store*, London: Ebury Press, 1991; Tim Dale, *Harrods: the Store and the Legend*, London: Pan, 1981; Tim Dale, *Harrods: a Palace in Knightsbridge*, London: Harrods Publishing, 1995; Michael Moss and Alison Turton, *A Legend of Retailing: House of Fraser*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1989.

<sup>12</sup> This is true of Breward *The Hidden Consumer*, Paul Glennie and Nigel Thrift, 'Consumption, Shopping and Gender' In Neil Wrigley and Michelle Lowe (eds), *Retailing, Consumption and Capital: Towards the New Retail Geography*, Harlow: Longman, 1996, 221-37; Mort, *Cultures of Consumption*; Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*.

<sup>13</sup> Johann Friedrich Geist, *Arcades: The History of a Building Type*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1983; Margaret MacKeith, *Shopping Arcades: a Gazetteer of Extant Arcades 1817 - 1939*, London: Mansell Publishing 1985; Margaret MacKeith, *The History and Conservation of Shopping Arcades*, London: Mansell, 1986; Claire Walsh, 'Shop Design and the Display of Goods in Eighteenth-Century London,' *Journal of Design History*, Vol.8 No.3 1995; Walsh, 'The Newness of the Department Store'.



modernity lay in its engagement with, and indeed existence within, mass media.<sup>14</sup> The thesis additionally relates to the substantial research on modernity and architectural Modernism, particularly recent work by Wigley addressing the relationship between Modernism, modernity, dress and the feminine, which has created a more complex understanding of their interconnectedness.<sup>15</sup>

Part II necessarily takes account of recent developments within architectural history and theory concerning the very nature of 'architecture', particularly the Modern. A key strand of this has highlighted the gendered nature of architecture. Leaving aside issues of the gendered nature of the profession practice,<sup>16</sup> work on the gendered experience of buildings and their spaces informed by the 'separate spheres' theories of social and gender historians provides a useful theoretical backdrop for this thesis; suggesting how architecture could serve to 'gender' a place.<sup>17</sup> Much of the recent work in this field has been structured and coloured by a strong feminist agenda, as expressed by Agrest et al.:

The inscription of the sexualized body is a central and recurrent theme in Western architecture, but that body is neither innocent nor androgynous. It is a reification of the male longing to appropriate an exclusively female privilege: maternity ... an analysis of gender in modern architectural criticism reveals a social system that has historically functioned to contain, control, or exclude women.<sup>18</sup>

Despite this extensive literature, Durning and Wrigley note the slowness with which architectural history has responded to work within gender studies, and Leslie and Reimer perceive only a partial interrogation of the gendering of Modernism within the current field.<sup>19</sup> Perhaps the most useful contribution of this work is the revelation of Modernism's fraught relationship with its supposed feminine 'other'. Shopping cultures constitute just such an 'other', a study of which reveals the inherent tensions, inconsistencies and variety within Modernism.

<sup>14</sup> Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT, 1994.

<sup>15</sup> Wigley, *White Walls, Designer Dresses*.

<sup>16</sup> Examined, for example, in Katerina Ruedi, Sarah Wigglesworth and Duncan McCorquodale (eds), *Desiring Practices: Architecture Gender and the Interdisciplinary*, London: Black Dog, 1996.

<sup>17</sup> The key, principally North American, texts include; Diana Agrest, Patricia Conway and Leslie Kanes Weissman [eds.], *The Sex of Architecture*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996; Aaron Betsky, *Building Sex: Men, Women, Architecture, and the construction of Sexuality*, New York: William Morrow, 1995; Debra Coleman, Elizabeth Edanze and Carol Henderson, *Architecture and Feminism*, Princeton Architectural Press, 1996; Colomina, *Sexuality and Space*; Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity*; Louise Durning and Richard Wrigley, (eds.), *Gender and Architecture*, John Wiley and Sons, 2000; Alice T. Friedman, *Women and the Making of the Modern House: A Social and Architectural History*, Harry N. Abrams, 1998, Reed, *Not at Home*; Rendell, *The Pursuit of Pleasure*; Wigley, *White Walls, Designer Dresses*.

<sup>18</sup> Agrest et al., *The Sex of Architecture*, 11.

<sup>19</sup> Durning and Wrigley, *Gender and Architecture*, 1; Deborah Leslie and Suzanne Reimer, 'Gender, Modern Design and Home Consumption', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 2003, Vol. 21, 293-4.



Additionally, a body of new writing has prioritised a spatial understanding of architecture, responding to the limitations of the traditional domination of questions of style and authorship. A primary strand within this work is about the gendered nature of space, again drawing from feminist architectural theory.<sup>20</sup> The approach is usefully described by Durning and Wigley: ‘architecture structures and defines many of the social spaces in which different gendered identities are rehearsed, performed and made visible as a form of shared private and public spectacle.’<sup>21</sup> Whilst the gendering of space and place is clearly a useful consideration for studies of consumption such as this, the usually concomitant dismissal of matters of style and surface is particularly problematic for any discussion of retail architecture, where such things were inescapably important. Elizabeth McKellar calls for a new approach: ‘Might not one of the ways in which architectural history can grow and change be not simply jettisoning the ‘static object’, along with such associated matters as form and taste, but rather by critiquing existing histories of style and examining its meanings and uses from new perspectives?’<sup>22</sup> An answer is being provided by historians and theorists who address both space and surface, notably Colomina, Ward and Wigley.<sup>23</sup> Their studies have provided a much more complex, closely interrogated reading of the surface, foregrounding issues of gender, Modernism and communication.

Part II addresses architecture as designed structure, as a set of surfaces, as the ordering of space, as a system of representation, and the experience of the spaces, stages and boundaries that comprise it. It acknowledges that retail architecture is characterised by a particular ordering of surface, fabric and space which prioritises the styling of the street frontage and interior spaces. As this thesis is primarily concerned with the relationship between retail cultures and West End streets, it is principally concerned with the street frontage, whilst remaining mindful of the façade as link between street and shop interior, the location of the entrance, and the display of goods held inside. This interest in the West End’s surfaces is linked to a consideration of who controlled its messages; acknowledging the role of the architect and commissioning store owner within this, whilst positioning them within broader cultures of design and consumption.

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<sup>20</sup> See for example, Durning and Wigley (eds.), *Gender and Architecture*; Rendell, *The Pursuit of Pleasure*.

<sup>21</sup> Durning and Wigley, *Gender and Architecture*, 1.

<sup>22</sup> Elizabeth McKellar, review of Rendell, *The Pursuit of Pleasure*, in *Journal of Design History*, Vol.16, No.2, 2003, 191.

<sup>23</sup> Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity*; Janet Ward, *Weimar Surfaces: Urban Visual Culture in 1920s Germany*, Berkely, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2001; Wigley, *White Walls, Designer Dresses*.



## SOURCES

Material and represented West End shops, shopfronts and street scenes of the 1930s are the focus of Part II. The fact that retail architecture has been generally overlooked in architectural and shopping histories is all the more surprising given the richness of contemporary comment on the subject during the 1930s. Store archives reveal the importance of architecture and building for retailers, for whom it was a means to promote the modernity and success of their businesses and goods. It should also be noted that for the 1930s popular press, architecture proved a particularly important mechanism for discussing the issues surrounding shopping: comments on architecture figured prominently within public reception of new buildings, and were used to articulate pleasures and anxieties engendered by consumer cultures. But there was also a wealth of comment within professional architectural, advertising and design periodicals which reveal new attitudes towards constructing the built fabric of the West End's shopping streets. These discourses were augmented by a series of architectural exhibitions and books such as A. Trystan Edwards's *The Architecture of Shops* of 1933 and Bryan and Norman Westwood's *Smaller Retail Shops* of 1937 that spanned both professional and popular audiences.

The prominence of these textual sources in Part II is deliberate. Dean has described how architectural periodical publishing, particularly in the Modern camp, 'flourished in the 30s at a level hard to imagine today'.<sup>24</sup> A journalistic environment was fostered that attracted some of the most talented architectural writers of the period, including J. M. Richards and Nikolaus Pevsner, who created a 'preferred tone of wit and irony and suave insiderism ...' at the leading title, the *Architectural Review*.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, architectural historians have suggested that these publications were as important a stage for architecture as the streets themselves. They provided a particularly important venue for Modern architecture; which proliferated on these pages, although it was compromised, controlled and restricted by the authorities and clients in built projects. Authors such as Forty have specifically drawn attention to the textual nature of inter-war Modern architecture, despite Modernism's ostensible denial of language,<sup>26</sup> so that, as Favro posits, this architecture was 'as much

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<sup>24</sup> Dean, *The Thirties*, 81.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Adrian Forty, *Words and Buildings: a Vocabulary of Modern Architecture*, London: Thames and Hudson, 2000.



about words as about actual buildings'.<sup>27</sup> Drawing on the example of Le Corbusier's built and written oeuvre, Colomina suggests that the close connection between Modern architecture and its journals was absolutely fundamental to the Modern project, 'It is actually the emerging systems of communication that came to define twentieth-century culture - the mass media - that are the true site within which Modern architecture is produced and with which it directly engages. In fact, one could argue ... that modern architecture only becomes modern with its engagement with the media.'<sup>28</sup>

Within British architectural journalism, the Modern debates were articulated through image as well as text. [Figure 5.3] The new photography, characterised by simplicity and the dramatic use of sharp contrast, was exemplified by Dell and Wainwright, in-house photographers at the *Architectural Review*.<sup>29</sup> The use of photography and innovative graphics fuelled the competition between journals, thus helping to construct the identity of particular titles. *Printing* commented on the distinctiveness of architectural journals in this respect,

If you want to see specialised journals, and specialised advertising that is far better than the average, take a look at the architectural press. You won't be disappointed. You will find reflected therein something of the architect's own mind. In both the advertising and editorial columns there is evident, in regard to print, a breadth of vision, a forwardness, so often lacking in other professional organs.<sup>30</sup>

They also published architects' drawings which, as Powers notes, showed Modern buildings 'as their architects wished them to be seen, and without the complications of weathering and poor maintenance which normally tell against modern movement work.'<sup>31</sup> These images and plans articulated architectural discourse, and provided a viewing mechanism for buildings.

Journals also provided a forum for the battle between the Modern and traditional camps, titles polarising over this issue. The Modern standard passed from the *Architect and*

<sup>27</sup> Diane Favro, 'The Pen is Mightier than the Building: Writing on Architecture 1850 – 1940', in Diana Agrest, Patricia Conway and Leslie Kanes Weissman, [eds.], *The Sex of Architecture*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996, 295.

<sup>28</sup> Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity*, 14.

<sup>29</sup> Robert Elwall, *Photography Takes Command: The Camera and British Architecture 1890 - 1939*, London: RIBA Publications, 1994.

<sup>30</sup> *Printing*, October 1936

<sup>31</sup> Alan Powers, 'Look Stranger at this Island Now': *English Architectural Drawings of the Thirties*, London: The Architectural Association, 1979, 16.



*Building News* to the *Architectural Review* during the early thirties, whose contribution to this debate is described here by Elwall:

Its commitment to modern architecture assumed the form of a holy crusade and from its editorial pulpit each month the message was insistently thundered out that international modernism was the one true style which not only properly expressed the spirit of the age but to which there was no morally acceptable alternative. The *Review* deployed its entire arsenal of formidable weapons in the battle - careful selection of the right type of building for inclusion; fervent articles by writers dedicated to the cause, such as Shand, Jim Richards or Nikolaus Pevsner; eye-catching page layouts; experiments with the latest innovations in typography and, above all, dazzling photographs.<sup>32</sup>

The *Architect's' Journal* attempted to provide more objective coverage, *The Builder* leant further towards traditional architecture, and the *RIBA Journal* and *Country Life* had a distinctly conservative flavour.<sup>33</sup> The various journals thus constituted distinctive voices in the heated discussions over what constituted good British architecture in the 1930s.

Part II draws on discussions of architecture's existence within printed media, but also considers its real context and materiality. It was, after all, in the street that the West End's shopping cultures thrived, and that the relationship between shopping and architecture was forged. It is suggested that these publications provided a conceptual framework for the construction and the reading of this street scene, and committed to text some of the most intangible elements of this complex relationship.

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<sup>32</sup> Elwall, *Photography Takes Command*, 75-6.

<sup>33</sup> David Watkin outlines the nature of the architectural journal scene in some detail in David Watkin, 'Architectural Writing in the Thirties', in Gavin Stamp (ed.), *AD Profile 24: Britain in the Thirties*, London: Architectural Design, 1979.



## 6.

# ‘THE FACE OF LONDON IS BEING LIFTED ALMOST OUT OF RECOGNITION’: ARCHITECTURAL TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE WEST END SHOPPING STREET

The face of London is being lifted almost out of recognition. Our old friends the streets suddenly confront us as acquaintances with whom we are hardly on bowing terms.

(‘A New London’, *Vogue*, August 5, 1936, 8-13.)

To understand the impact that the new Simpsons and Peter Jones stores had on West End consumption cultures, these buildings need to be positioned in their street context. As *Vogue* suggests, they were an important part of a broader trend of rebuilding within the metropolis. This chapter argues that a combination of the piecemeal but flourishing building process, and the dynamic between new and old buildings within the street context, produced a particular brand of modernity in the 1930s West End.

The fabric of cities constantly evolves, but 1930s London renewed itself particularly self-consciously, so much so that the parade of new buildings was presented as one of the ‘sights’ for tourists. The Automobile Association informed its members in 1934:

During the past few years the appearance of London has changed considerably, streets have been



‘THE FACE OF LONDON IS BEING LIFTED ALMOST OUT OF RECOGNITION’

widened and imposing new buildings are to be seen in all localities. The visitor may be interested in the many fine examples of the modern trend in architecture, as in addition to public and commercial building - including the foremost stores - the advance in theatre and cinema design is particularly noticeable.<sup>1</sup>

These comments place the West End, and the breadth of rebuilding associated with its consumption cultures, at the heart of the 1930s urban renewal. However, this rebuilding was hotly contested, and the positioning of business owners, architects, planners, conservationists, journalists, the tourist industry and the public within this debate reveals the attitudes of the various parties to novelty, modernity and Modernism as well as fashionable consumption. This dialogue provided an important context for the new Simpsons and Peter Jones buildings. It becomes clear that the shop building process articulated and mediated the tensions between tradition and modernity. The whole process was crucial to the character of the West End: transforming its physical form, renewing its surfaces, spaces and configurations.

#### ‘IN OXFORD STREET THERE IS SEEMINGLY NO END TO REBUILDING OPERATIONS’: PATTERNS OF REBUILDING IN THE 1930S WEST END

Modernity expressed through urban transformation, effected over a period of years or during the course of a day, is one of the central themes of this thesis, and rebuilding was an established means through which cities transformed themselves. This thesis argues that architectural renewal, the reconfiguration of shopping routes, transforming spectacular practices and evolving consumer identities were all interrelated, reflecting both changes in the West End’s cultures of consumption, and the requirement of those cultures for newness. Store monographs, with their celebratory roll-call of new buildings, provide an important insight. Shops were frequently rebuilt, or partially rebuilt, because for store owners the very process of building, and the adoption of a succession of newly available architectural styles, performed an important function: they proclaimed a company’s modernity and fashionability. Hence W. H. Godfrey wrote of Bond Street that it was, ‘suitable that a street whose name is the epitome of fashion should wear a changing face itself.’<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *The London Guide*, London: The Automobile Association, 1934, 27.

<sup>2</sup> W. H. Godfrey, ‘Dear Street’, *Country Life*, 1 May 1937, p.liii.



But, as Nead has shown, this modernity lay not only in the process of renewal, but also in the dialogue that was maintained between the old and new fabric of the city.<sup>3</sup> Whereas in Nead’s Victorian London this dialogue was between the contrasting large-scale improvement schemes and ‘Babylonian’ decay, in the 1930s West End, individual buildings appeared in great volume but in a piecemeal fashion, modern beacons emerging within a streetscape which comprised a patchwork of periods and styles. Buildings were thrown into sharp contrast with each other, accentuating the modernity of some, and the outdated-ness of others.

Chapter 2 outlined a burgeoning literature that has addressed the way shifting geographies of retail have contributed to urban reconfigurations. Part II contributes to a small and partial body of research that examines the pivotal role of retail *architecture* in changing the shape of the modern city. Studies of the arcade, the department store and mall have been the most important in this respect. For example, Betsky has argued that the turn-of-the-century arcade was an important means of reconfiguring the city, ‘These were spaces that dissolved the fixed and closed orders of the block and opened up an unreal space of thin membranes of steel, supporting glass that kept the sun and the rain out but did not act so much as a barrier as a transforming lens.’<sup>4</sup> [Figure 6.1] Department stores have been ascribed a particularly prominent role in dictating the physical form of the new urban cultures of the nineteenth century, described, for example, by James as ‘the linchpins of Germany’s new city centres, preceding the emergence within these districts of purpose-built office blocks on the same scale...’.<sup>5</sup> Within department store studies, an important strand has been new stores’ domination of the older retail streetscape, with their unprecedented scale and extravagant designs, captured in images of the partially rebuilt Liberty’s of Regent Street, in 1924.<sup>6</sup> Work on the mall has also highlighted the ability of retail buildings to reorient cities away from centres, and, connectedly, change the kind of buildings that housed consumer cultures.<sup>7</sup>

Walkowitz has already argued for the importance of buildings in redefining the West End

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<sup>3</sup> Nead, *Victorian Babylon*.

<sup>4</sup> Betsky, *Building Sex*.

<sup>5</sup> James, ‘From Messel to Mendelsohn’, 252

<sup>6</sup> This work draws on the agenda set out in Zola’s *Au Bonheur des Dames*, which described the physical impact of the department store building, portraying this as significant in, and symbolic of, the eclipsing of the small shopkeeper and traditional urban life. Emile Zola, *The Ladies’ Paradise*, Oxford University Press, 1998.

<sup>7</sup> Longstreth, *City Centre to Regional Mall*; Longstreth, *The Drive-in*.



during the nineteenth century: ‘a modern landscape had been constructed of office buildings, shops, department stores, museums, opera, concert halls, music halls, restaurants and hotels.’<sup>8</sup> This research revisits this subject, looking particularly at the transformative role of the Modern shop in this place during the 1930s.

An examination of patterns of rebuilding is revealing. The 1930s West End appears at first glance to be characterised by comparative architectural stasis. It followed a period that had witnessed the protracted rebuilding of Regent Street, one of the key shopping arteries at the heart of the area. The prime actors in this complete urban remodelling had been the Crown (the landowner) and heavyweights from the architectural establishment, primarily Richard Norman Shaw and Reginald Blomfield.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the 1930s preceded an era significant destruction due to wartime bombing, and projects for comprehensive rebuilding in the post-war era. There *was* talk of replanning central London during the 1930s. Abercrombie’s famous plans for London of 1943 and 1944 had important precursors in the Greater London Regional Planning Committee reports of 1929 and 1933, and the schemes of independent architectural associations such as the left-wing MARS group.<sup>10</sup> Whilst these plans did not generally address the West End directly, it was clearly implicated in their proposals for the development of a more rational metropolis. There were also the less formalised calls of architectural and social commentators for a radical rethinking of central areas. In particular, existing street patterns were felt to be inadequate to cope with the traffic congestion that was seen to result from the construction of tall buildings.<sup>11</sup> However this talk came to nothing, and commentators were left grumbling about the impossibility of changing London in the face of these complex vested interests.<sup>12</sup> Architectural change in the 1930s took the form of the demolition, rebuilding and refurbishment of individual plots by store owners, employing architects working in various genres.

Architecturally, then, the 1930s might be assumed a short interval of stasis, out of step with the flourishing West End consumer cultures examined in this thesis. However, this study

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<sup>8</sup> Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, 25.

<sup>9</sup> Accounts of the rebuilding of Regent Street are given in Hobhouse, *A History of Regent Street* and Rappaport, ‘Art, Commerce, or Empire?’.

<sup>10</sup> The MARS (Modern Architectural Research) Group produced a number of plans for London. The first, by William and Aileen Tatton Brown, was presented to the CIAM congress of 1937. John R. Gold, ‘In Search of Modernity: The Urban Projects of the Modern Movement, 1929-39’, in James Peto and Donna Loveday (eds.), *Modern Britain 1929 - 1939*, London: The Design Museum, 1999, 46.

<sup>11</sup> See for example in A. Trystan Edwards, *The Architecture of Shops*, London: Chapman and Hall, 1933; *Modern Architecture in England*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1937, 32.

<sup>12</sup> See for example Harold P. Clunn, *The Face of London: The Record of a Century’s Changes and Development*, London: Simpkin Marshall, 1937, 483.



suggests that the continual piecemeal renewal of the West End building by building could effect a significant transformation, as *The Star* envisioned the new D. H. Evans: ‘An acre of London is to be pulled down and on it will rise a store-de-luxe, a business palace of steel and glass, modern in spirit yet moulded on lines of graceful Gothic architecture ... It will be a new London landmark, a thing of almost cathedralesque beauty.’<sup>13</sup> This study further argues that such a rebuilding pattern, led by commerce rather than by landowner or state, was particularly in tune with the consumption cultures of the West End.

The 1930s witnessed a huge number of shop building projects. By 1930, W. Stanley Edgson, a member of the Auctioneers’ and Estate Agents’ Institute, was already alarmed by the national rate of retail building: ‘I have been very concerned as to whether, since the war, there has not been considerable over-development of shop property’.<sup>14</sup> A survey of the coverage of new buildings in the professional and popular architectural press reveals that this trend was particularly apparent between 1936 and 1939, and furthermore that a large proportion of retail rebuilding was located in the West End. In 1937, Harold Clunn noted, ‘In Oxford Street there is seemingly no end to rebuilding operations.’<sup>15</sup> Similarly, the *Financial Times* reported in 1936, ‘The day cannot be far distant when the whole of Oxford Street will be modernised and rebuilt on the grand scale. Already the extreme West section is completely transformed and a series of great modern buildings occupies the whole stretch between Edgware Road and Orchard Street.’<sup>16</sup> The paper claimed that this was a particularly good time for stores to rebuild due the cheapness and speed of construction techniques and the availability of labour.

Mapping out the new stores provides a compelling picture of architectural vibrancy within the West End. [Figures 6.2, 6.3, 6.4 and 6.5] The big stores included, of course, Simpsons and Peter Jones, and in Oxford Street alone there were also the rear block of John Lewis by Slater, Moberly and Uren with F. Singer of 1937-9, D. H. Evans by Louis Blanc of 1937, HMV by Emberton, 1938-9, the Marks and Spencer Marble Arch shop by Trehearne and Norman of 1930, and the Pantheon store of 1938 by Robert Lutyens. [Figure 6.6] In Tottenham Court Road, Maufe substantially extended Smith and Brewer’s Heals building in 1937. [Figure 6.7] In Kensington High Street were Derry and Toms of 1933 and John

<sup>13</sup> *The Star*, 19 January 1935.

<sup>14</sup> A. Edward Hammond, *Multiple Shop Organisation*, London: Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons, 1930, Appendix 1, 127.

<sup>15</sup> Harold P. Clunn, *The Face of London: The Record of a Century’s Changes and Development*, London: Simpkin Marshall, 1937, 497.

<sup>16</sup> *Financial Times*, 20 May 1936.



Barker of 1937-8, both by Bernard George. Additionally, there was a proliferation of renovation projects and the partial rebuilding of ground floors and shopfronts of existing buildings.

It should be noted that the published sources only represent the proportion of shops built which coincided with editorial criteria, biased towards well-known architects, significant clients, London sites, and particular genres of architecture, according to the journal profile. However, as argued earlier, professional and popular publishing was a particularly important venue for staging and shaping architecture during the thirties, and so the selection of shops that were published in these places gained a particular importance. In addition, the very volume of the coverage evidences a period of architectural opportunity in the retail sphere, and highlights the perception of the West End as its focal point. This evidence is supported by store records, which reveal a period of site acquisition and development, despite the supposed backdrop of economic crisis and nervousness surrounding the onset of international political instability. Marks and Spencer, for example, opened 167 new stores during the 1930s, which represented a staggering expenditure on building. Similarly, the House of Fraser was expanding its chain of department stores, predominantly buying up existing stores and retaining their buildings, but also dealing in prime property with a view to developing new stores.

This research suggests the prosperity of the West End's consumption cultures and its architectural renewal were clearly connected. Refacing and refurbishing an existing shop constituted a significant financial commitment; to build a new shop was an enormous investment. Simpsons was built at a cost of £150,000, with a ground rent of £11,000 even before operational costs were taken into account.<sup>17</sup> Simpson Ltd told its chain of agents in 1936, 'This project is extremely costly. It is so costly, indeed, that Simpson cannot hope, and are not hoping, to derive any profit whatever from its actual trading - at least for several years.'<sup>18</sup> Store owners' decisions to build and renovate in this place were extremely important. The evidence of building work in the West End's shopping streets suggests that metropolitan retail businesses and their associated consumer cultures were sufficiently buoyant to support such projects in a period of acknowledged national, and international, economic depression. *The Economist* reported in 1935 on the significance of these building schemes,

<sup>17</sup> Figures noted in the obituary of Alexander Simpson, *Cavalcade* 22 May 1937.

<sup>18</sup> Memorandum issued to small retailers of Simpson Ltd clothes nationwide, c. 1935. Simpsons Archive.



The regional analysis of sales suggests that suburban London and the provinces have fared relatively better than West End centres during the year. There is, however, no sign of reduced enterprise in the West End. This week a building scheme has been announced by D. H. Evans and Co., which is to provide six acres of selling space and cater for a trade of £2,000,000 per year. ... it appears that retailing on the grand scale can still hold its own against improved services offered in the suburbs and provinces.<sup>19</sup>

This picture contributes to an understanding of London, especially central London, as displaying an architectural activity at odds with a narrative of decline.<sup>20</sup> It should also be noted that the flourishing of West End retail had architectural implications for the city that went beyond its shopping streets. There were vast numbers of staff, many of them young and unmarried, requiring a certain type of accommodation. The practice of accommodating staff in the shop itself had largely died out by the 1930s, but some of the larger stores continued to provide staff ‘hostel’s.<sup>21</sup> [Figure 6.8] Speculative developments like ‘The Grampians’ in Shepherds Bush were also being constructed ‘to provide low-rented flats for people working in the city and large stores’.<sup>22</sup>

### ‘GANTRIES AND PARAPETS AND GIRDERS’: THE VISIBILITY OF THE REBUILDING PROCESS

Nead has described how ‘the spectacle of building works’ occasioned by Victorian London’s large scale street and rail improvement schemes, revealed the character of the city’s modernity.<sup>23</sup> In the 1930s West End the processes of demolition and architectural renewal, were equally visible. But this time, discussions of modernity were framed differently. Now, modernity was characterised by the dominance of commercial cultures rather than the rationalising projects of the state. Furthermore, it was articulated through a discourse on taste rather than decay, and the remedy was presented as a series of Modern

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<sup>19</sup> *The Economist*, 26 January 1935.

<sup>20</sup> The GLC’s Regional Planning Committee noted the relative prosperity of London during the depression. *Second Report of the Greater London Regional Planning Committee*, March 1933, 54. Knowles and Pitt note that London was not hit by the building trades depression nearly as much as the provinces, although there was still significant unemployment builders and architects. C. C. Knowles, and P. H. Pitt, *The History of Building Regulation in London 1189-1972*, London: Architectural Press, 1972, 107.

<sup>21</sup> Bourne and Hollingsworth’s new Gower Street hostel was published in *Architect and Building News*, 20 November 1936, 226-7.

<sup>22</sup> *The Builder*, 10 May 1935, 882.

<sup>23</sup> Nead, *Victorian Babylon*, 42. The theme of decay, disease and decline in Victorian London is also discussed in Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*.



beacons of consumption lining the streets rather than the construction of Imperial route ways.<sup>24</sup>

In the 1930s West End hoardings, cranes and builders were permanent fixtures in the West End's streets as the built fabric was constantly reworked. The visibility of the rebuilding process meant that architectural evolution and renewal formed an integral part of the visual identity of the area. It created an atmosphere of flux, and drew attention to the modernity at the heart of the area's character, as architecture attempted to keep pace with fashionable goods. The rebuilding formed the context for its shopping practices and the backdrop for its pageants. [Figure 6.9] A series of photographs capture the royal Jubilee cortege processing past the spectacular emerging structure of the new Peter Jones store in 1935, its girders providing a useful vantage point for the intrepid onlooker. The rebuilding process was sometimes actively publicised as it symbolised progress and modernity. For example, In 1938, Jacqmar used a series of photographs of a refurbishment to advertise its new Grosvenor Street shop.<sup>25</sup>

[Figure 6.10] The spectacle of the rebuilding of an individual shop was no less significant for taking place within a single plot. The transformation of the site of 202 Piccadilly provides a typical example of this spectacle. [Figure 6.11] Between 1935 and 1936 the unfashionable early Victorian Italianate Geological Museum was demolished, and a Modern steel skeleton emerged, before being clothed in a fittingly modern skin for the new Simpsons shop. The construction of Simpsons was recorded in great detail in the extensive correspondence between the store owner, architect, engineers and other professionals. [Figure 6.12] The building of Peter Jones, on the other hand, was more prolonged, taking place in four stages between 1932 and 1937, with a fifth stage in Cadogan Gardens finally completed in 1963. The building process was captured in a series of photographs, now within the store's records, and was eagerly followed in the press.<sup>26</sup> The building work took place behind colourful hoardings, marking out the space for transformation and wrapping the nascent building like a gift for the city. The spectacle of the building site was described by a *Store* reporter, 'Standing on gantries and parapets and girders, I have watched demolition proceeding on one portion of this island site and structural activities on another.

<sup>24</sup> This discourse of 'taste' is exemplified by John Betjeman's publication *Ghastly Good Taste: or a Depressing Story of the Rise and Fall of English Architecture* of 1933.

<sup>25</sup> *Vogue*, 25 May 1938, p.47.

<sup>26</sup> For example, *The Drapers Record* reported on 26 January 1935 that demolition had begun of the buildings on the Kings Road, Sloane Square and Simons Street, temporary showrooms installed in Cadogan Gardens.



I have had portions pointed out to me that, now occupied by selling departments, are scheduled for destruction a few days hence ...’.<sup>27</sup>

However, shopping cultures were not halted by this spectacle. Unlike Simpsons, most stores were operational during as much of the building or renovation work as possible, to maintain continuity of business. This was particularly important given the high level of West End ground rents. This resulted in the common sight of makeshift ‘temporary shops’ within the street. Peter Jones had planned to be open during the period of building, taking advantage of the flexibility of an in-house building department. The chairman of John Lewis stressed his concern to his Building Committee about the risk of losing business during a period of upturn in trade.<sup>28</sup> The ground floor of the new Peter Jones shop opened for business on 16 November 1935, whilst building work went on above. The *Cabinet Maker* reported that, nonetheless, John Lewis was expecting a loss of £65,000 from disruption of trade and delayed earnings on capital due to the building work: this was clearly something the company wished to keep to a minimum.<sup>29</sup> The *Financial Times* believed that the necessity of rebuilding in this piecemeal fashion in key West End sites was a major obstacle to redevelopment, ‘many companies are clinging to an old-fashioned, out-of-date building because the directors have not the courage to face this period of discomfort with the attendant risks of loss of business.’<sup>30</sup>

Stores, however, could evolve in less dramatic ways. Indeed, to reduce the expense and disruption caused by rebuilding, the potential for architectural change had traditionally been designed into store buildings. This was partly about creating stores with flexible interiors, as the *Architectural Review* expressed: ‘the primary requirement in the planning of department stores is *adaptability*, and the successful store plan is one that permits any number of different arrangements of its selling space’.<sup>31</sup> For Mr Simpson, a flexible building was essential to offset the risk he was taking on the retail project. He wrote to his architect, ‘On the assumption that at some future date the whole of the upper floors might be occupied by offices, would there be any difficulty in making an entrance to same in Piccadilly by an alteration to the shopfront and putting in lift accommodation or,

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<sup>27</sup> *Store*, October 1936, 3.

<sup>28</sup> Minutes of the John Lewis Building Committee, 14 September 1933. John Lewis Partnership Archive.

<sup>29</sup> *Cabinet Maker*, 2 August 1935.

<sup>30</sup> *Financial Times*, 20 May 1936.

<sup>31</sup> *Architectural Review*, June 1939, 293.



alternatively, using the existing lifts that at present supply the shop?’<sup>32</sup> Stores’ structures also ideally needed to allow for future spatial expansion. For example, Peter Jones’ lightwells were designed to be filled in with additional floor area, once better artificial lighting could be achieved. The need to extend beyond the original building envelope encouraged the design of façades that could be extended whilst preserving architectural integrity. Selfridges was a good example of this, replicating sections of its colonnaded frontage as further plots of land were acquired.<sup>33</sup> Simpsons and Peter Jones were both designed to extend skywards as increased building heights were permitted.<sup>34</sup> *Industrial Arts* reported, ‘the elevation of Simpsons presents one complete design, which is so scaled that, if extension were needed, its repetition would increase the power of the design as it increased in size.’<sup>35</sup>

Retail architecture’s flexibility often went beyond the spatial or structural, and was directly related to the envisaged changed stylistic requirements. As will be discussed, this was more problematic for Modernism, with its refusal to be identified as a fleeting style, hence the fact that it was frequently the Modern stores that exploited the adaptability of built structures to the full raises interesting questions. The design of the iconic façade of Peter Jones is a useful case in point. Although this was a defining element of the architecture, and indeed soon became emblematic of the store’s identity, during the planning stages discussions took place about the potential for the future replacement of the curtain walling’s glass panels with travertine or plaster, according to taste.<sup>36</sup> The resulting design was highly adjustable, as the *Architects’ Journal* reported,

The aim of the architects has been to provide a facing which will have the advantages of permanency, while at the same time allowing for a certain amount of variety. The whole appearance of this building can be changed at very low cost, by changing the background to the glass panels which mask the floor levels, and painting the vertical mullions a different colour. Behind the protective glass panelling almost any finish can be used, including even ordinary wallpaper.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Letter Alexander Simpson to Joseph Emberton 20 May 1935, Simpsons Archive.

<sup>33</sup> Proctor’s study of the Parisian nineteenth-century department store has uncovered a practice of designing the building for a currently owned site with the projected design for the whole island block in mind, whether its future purchase was secured or not. Robert Proctor, ‘Negotiating space: the Parisian department store and its property’, paper given at the CHORD conference, University of Wolverhampton, 15-16 September 2004.

<sup>34</sup> Emberton wrote to Simpson in April 1935 that he was, ‘bearing in mind the need for such flexibility of structure as will enable the shop to be extended upwards at a later date.’ Letter from Joseph Emberton to Alexander Simpson 10 April 1935, Simpsons Archive. Similar plans are recorded in Minutes of the John Lewis Building Committee, 15 November 1933. John Lewis Partnership Archive.

<sup>35</sup> *Industrial Arts*, Summer 1936, 94.

<sup>36</sup> For example, Minutes of the Peter Jones Ltd Subcommittee for Design, 11 June 1934.

<sup>37</sup> *Architects’ Journal*, 9 July 1936, 53.



This approach to store design placed ephemerality, fluidity and novelty at the heart of retail architecture, aligned with the commodity through its response to the changing demands of fashionable consumption cultures. Jaeger, feted as another exemplar of Modern design in the period, placed flexibility at the conceptual centre of the redesign of its flagship Regent Street shop in a most explicit way: ‘The new Jaeger shop may be called a “flexible” shop. That is to say, the conception is elastic. At any time alterations and additions may be made - to fit in with some new Jaeger idea.’<sup>38</sup>

The most flexible element of a store’s visual identity was the shopfront; the street façade to the ground or ground and first floor. Replacement of this accounted for much store rebuilding in the period, and was a recognised means of quickly transforming the identity of a shop. The short life of the shopfront was noted by *Commercial Art*, ‘New designs have, of course, appeared unceasingly ... these are changing days in architecture, and many of the shopfront designs favoured today may prove to be of ephemeral popularity.’<sup>39</sup> [Figure 4.5] This was the only area of expression allowed to retailers within the monolithic architecture of Regent Street.

It appears, then, that despite the associated upheaval, flexibility was integral to the design of stores, whether in terms of the potential to shift internal workings behind a static façade, or ability to transform the surface of the building. Simpsons’ façade, of course, changed remarkably little during its six decades of business: the store’s requirement for surface novelty was met rather through the lighting and decoration strategies that will be explored in Part III. It was also the case that visual flexibility was constantly balanced against the continuity of image that architecture helped to provide.

### ‘STRANGE DIVERSITY’: THE REAL STREET CONTEXT

The West End street depicted in architectural journals and retail design texts, focusing as they did on new developments, was an imagined street filled with new, and largely Modern, buildings. But the West End was actually characterised by a series of contrasts between different sized structures, traditional and modern building styles, old and new building fabric. The new shops coexisted with the old-fashioned structures which had

<sup>38</sup> *Commercial Art and Industry*, July 1935, 27.

<sup>39</sup> *Commercial Art*, March 1930, 132.



accumulated gradually, especially the florid Victorian and Edwardian retail architecture. Stark juxtapositions existed between adjacent streets, neighbouring shops, and even between different parts of the same building. This architectural ‘patchwork’ formed the context for the new retail projects of the 1930s, profoundly affecting their impact within the West End street.

Part I has already established the distinctiveness of particular streets within the West End, according to gender and class of shop and consumer. This was closely linked to, and expressed through, differentiation in the scale of buildings, frequency of rebuilding and styles used. Social commentators picked up on this variation of London’s character, street by street,

There are several village streets round the hub of the universe [meaning the West End]. Whitcomb Street is one of them. The great world of theatres, offices, department stores, and tube stations is at the next turning: and here, whence one would have thought the intense energy of modern times would long ago have wrested it, is a placid leisured sub-world that has a rural completeness and self-sufficiency ...<sup>40</sup>

A study of the makeup of individual streets from street photographs and descriptive accounts reveals that coexistence of the past with the present was also a defining element *within* each London street, new buildings were placed side by side with old ones. William Gaunt described Leicester Square:

At the corner a modest little bit of stucco over a restaurant. Next door to it a dainty architectural romance of about 1903, with mullioned bay-windows of stone and a top storey that rises to a pediment. This is *The Studio* building, whose neighbour supplies the dominant architectural note of this side of the square. Swashbuckling, and full of braggadoccio, it seems to inflate its chest and proudly display the decorations which an unbridled imagination has lavished upon it. ... No two buildings are the same height or alike in any of their details ... *This is one of the reasons why the appearance of London is radically different from all other cities in the world. As a miscellany it is incomparable.*<sup>41</sup> [emphasis added]

[Figure 6.13] Simpsons is a useful case in point: it was sandwiched between a Lyons cafe and Alfred Waterhouse’s bank of 1892-4. The *Architectural Review* read the building contextually, ‘Among the essays in various academic styles that form its immediate

<sup>40</sup> William Gaunt, *London Promenade*, London: The Studio, 1930, 33.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.



neighbours, [Emberton’s] building stands out as noticeably sensible and contemporary, with real refinement of its own kind.’<sup>42</sup>

London guides used this temporal patchwork as a selling point for the city, a source of idiosyncratic ‘charm’. It was described in *London the Wonder City*:

City of magnetic interest, a treasure house of tradition and retrospect. Old and new oddly merged together in quaint yet harmonious grouping ... Period pieces wedged into the patchwork picture contrasting with the dignity of Wren architecture, and with the stately magnitude of modern buildings. Never competing with each other, but the one style serving as foil to the other’s beauty. That is the city’s charm: its strange diversity and paradoxical unity.<sup>43</sup>

Piecemeal development of the kind practiced in the 1930s created a dialogue with past Londons that corresponded to a nostalgic sensibility within modern urban life, as captured by Gaunt: ‘the traditional London is not seen with a complete abandonment of the time sense, but in the post-war atmosphere, and such phenomena as cocktails and the bright young people remind us that London is definitely in the twentieth century.’<sup>44</sup> Direct parallels can be drawn with Nead’s discussion of modernity’s engagement with the past in Victorian London: ‘It is as though the newness of the modern could not be conveyed in isolation and could be articulated only through its relationship to the old.’<sup>45</sup> De Certeau and Zizek’s concept of the ‘haunted’ city is also invoked.<sup>46</sup>

The West End’s history was ever present, in the imaginations of visitors and in traces left on buildings. In the 1930s, Marks and Spencer bought the site of the former Pantheon at 173 Oxford Street: the infamous eighteenth-century ‘pleasure dome’ designed by architect James Wyatt, which had become a bazaar in the nineteenth century. [Figure 6.5] A neo-Georgian store by Robert Lutyens, also called the Pantheon, was built on the site in 1937, echoing the era of the original building.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, traces of the elite masculine leisured wanderings and exhibitionary cultures housed in the Geological Museum remained in the new Simpsons building. Indeed, for a time some London guidebooks continued to list the museum in tours of Piccadilly, although had been demolished. *Architect and Building*

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<sup>42</sup> *Architectural Review*, June 1936, 270.

<sup>43</sup> *London the Wonder City*, Pullman Car Company, 1937, 15.

<sup>44</sup> William Gaunt, *London Promenade*, London: The Studio, 1930, 2-3.

<sup>45</sup> Nead, *Victorian Babylon*, 30.

<sup>46</sup> de Certeau et al., *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Discussed in Donald, *Imagining the Modern City*, London: Athlone, 17-18.

<sup>47</sup> See ‘The Pantheon: London’s First Variety Store’, *Chain and Multiple Store*, 22 October 1938.



*News* noted other continuities, suggesting that the impact of Simpsons on Piccadilly in 1936 was intricately connected to its relationship with the building that it replaced,

An architectural newcomer to Piccadilly is an event of importance, especially when it occupies the site of a building so conspicuously meritorious ... as Sir James Pennethorne's Geological Museum. It is high praise to say that Mr Emberton's modern store inherits the virtues of its predecessor, and we gladly recognise in the new building the modesty, ingenuity and refinement which characterised the old.<sup>48</sup>

Whilst a new approach to form and internal volumes were key considerations of Modern Movement architecture, the irregular footprints of both Peter Jones and Simpsons were dictated by the historical contours of the West End's streets, echoing the shapes of earlier buildings.

If the old and new coexisted within the West End street, so did new architecture of different styles. 'Modern' has emerged as the dominant architectural legacy of the inter-war period, and Part II certainly argues that its proliferation in the West End coincided with thriving metropolitan retail cultures that were a central element of 1930s life. However there was great variety in inter-war architectural practice, a fact acknowledged by historians concerned with revising Modernism's totalising historical rhetoric.<sup>49</sup> Stores were still being built in other idioms, for example Robert Lutyens' prolific work in the Neo-Georgian style for Marks and Spencer. It is also significant that many of the big West End stores had carried out important rebuilding work during the 1920s before the flowering of British Modern architecture, when the use of 'historical' architectural styles was in vogue. These buildings would still have been read as relatively 'new' within the 1930s street scene, but presented a very different image from that of stores like Simpsons and Peter Jones. [Figure 6.14] The prime example of this was the recently rebuilt Regent Street but 1920s buildings in traditional styles were scattered throughout the area, and comprised some of the major West End landmarks, for instance Maurice Webb's decidedly Baroque alterations for the Army and Navy store in Victoria Street,<sup>50</sup> and also Debenham and Freebody's in Wigmore St<sup>51</sup> and Peter Robinson in Oxford Street.<sup>52</sup> [Figure 6.15] There

<sup>48</sup> *Architect and Building News*, May 8, 1936, 155.

<sup>49</sup> Charlotte and Tom Benton, 'Architecture: Contrasts of a decade' in Jennifer Hawkins and Marianne Hollis (eds.) *Thirties: British Art and Design Before the War*, London: Arts Council: 1979; Gavin Stamp (ed.), *Britain in the Thirties*. A corresponding point is made about Modernist discourse on an international scale in William Curtis, *Modern Architecture since 1900*, London and New York: Phaidon, 1996, Chapter 17.

<sup>50</sup> *The Builder*, 8 January 1926.

<sup>51</sup> *Brick Builder*, May 1925.



were also a number of idiosyncratic architectural projects, including the rear block of the recently built Liberty store in Regent Street that employed a neo-Tudor style for its Argyle Street frontage. During the 1930s, these companies were thus apparently saddled with unfashionable buildings they could not afford to replace. However, there is little sign that they wished to: Liberty frequently proudly used the Argyle Street frontage to advertise the company.

Moreover, there was much variation *within* the Modern camp during the 1930s.<sup>53</sup> For ‘purists’, Modernism was a completely new way of thinking about architecture, akin to a belief system, for others it was merely a fashionable, and marketable, style of building. This was a fundamental difference that was bitterly debated. The ‘purists’ accused the ‘stylists’ of watering down Modernism, and blurring the boundaries with the variously termed late American Art Deco, ‘Jazz Modern’, ‘Modernistic’ or ‘Moderne’ style which they particularly reviled. As will be shown, this charge of reducing Modernism to a ‘style’ was easily directed at retail architecture due to the prominent role of the façade, the styled interior and the business of fashion. [Figure 6.16] These influences are readily appreciable in work such as the Gerald Lacoste’s Bruton Street showroom for Hartnell of 1934, which featured luxurious interior styling in tasteful silver green and large expanses of mirror.<sup>54</sup>

Professional divisions along these lines preoccupied the architectural community. The *Architects’ Journal*’s ‘Astragal’ column provides a useful snapshot of the architectural community in its review of the year 1936:

The ‘Georgian’ merchants have dug in their heels and have decided to stick by their measured drawings. The other second-handers, the ‘*moderne*’ men, refuse resolutely to improve their plans, but are now quite decided in their elevational tricks and trimmings. The much smaller but more sincere and intelligent group who deal in the real (modern) thing have settled down comfortably within their chosen limitations and are quite determined, and commendably so, to reach optimum development with almost uncivilised speed. And a still smaller group, wider in age range than is generally suspected, refuse to join any cult or accept any limiting creed, refuse even to be known as a group, but keep their minds on first principles and are not afraid to use any methods, new or old, which make for a better architectural synthesis that has yet, collectively, been achieved.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>52</sup> *The Builder*, 9 March 1923, 392

<sup>53</sup> Dean and Stamp describe the variety within the Modern style, and the tensions that arose between Modernists and those seen as corrupting the movement by turning it into a style. Dean, *The Thirties*; Stamp, *Britain in the Thirties*, 22. Powers outlines the multiplicity within the Modern in broader cultural life. Alan Powers, ‘The Search for a New Reality’, James Peto and Donna Loveday (eds.), *Modern Britain 1929 – 1939*, London: The Design Museum, 1999.

<sup>54</sup> *Architecture Illustrated*, December 1934, 179 - 184, *The Architects’ Journal*, January 17 1935, 191-192.

<sup>55</sup> *Architects’ Journal* 14 January 1937, 89.



This apparent professional acrimony tempers the harmonious view of contrasts within the street scene conveyed by *London Promenade* and *London the Wonder City*. The various architectural factions did not sit easily together, and the battle polarised particularly conspicuously between traditional and Modern. Dean makes the point that

in the 1930s to declare yourself modern was consciously to take a militant position and there was no shortage of enemies. Besides the reactionaries, there was a formidable alliance of traditionalists who found the starkness and strangeness of modernism aesthetically, even morally, abhorrent, of people with a financial or an emotional vested interest in the conventional, of those who simply disliked what was on offer or who were very satisfied with things the way they were.<sup>56</sup>

This division was deepened by additional generational differences, and alignments with national or international cultures.<sup>57</sup> It was a vocal debate played out in the street scene as much as in the media.

Despite history's subsequent fetishisation of the Modern, many felt that the traditional camp was far from beaten. For example, conservative architect and commentator A. Trystan Edwards wrote in 1933, 'many people ... are beginning to realise that in spite of the determined onslaughts which the modernists have directed against the traditional styles, the latter are by no means prepared to die an easy death.'<sup>58</sup> Dean has also suggested that the actual number of built Modern projects should not be overestimated: 'apart from domestic houses, few openings offered themselves to the modern architect ... for the most part the modernists were confined to interior design (where, behind a conventional exterior if need be, the modern could flourish without public affront) and ... to exhibition work.'<sup>59</sup> Nonetheless, within retail architecture there was a discernible movement away from the traditional towards the Modern in significance *and* in number of projects. *The Builder* commented as early as 1929, 'The English tradition in shops, handed over from the Georgian period, still maintains a grip, and blossoms out here and there in such delightful examples as "La Grande Perfumerie" in Regent Street, designed by Messrs Mewès and

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<sup>56</sup> Dean, *The Thirties*, 9. Dean also describes a revealing debate between Blomfield, traditional architect responsible for Regent Street, and Connell, rising Modernist talent, in the radio broadcast: 'For and Against Modern Architecture' of 1934. He suggests that the traditional camp betrayed a xenophobic approach to Modern architecture.

<sup>57</sup> Discussed in Stamp (ed.), *Britain in the Thirties*.

<sup>58</sup> A. Trystan Edwards, *The Architecture of Shops*, London: Chapman and Hall, 1933, 63

<sup>59</sup> Dean, *The Thirties*, 102



Davis; but a stronger influence from abroad is invading the field and overriding our tradition.’<sup>60</sup>

‘THAT ... IT KILLS ITS NEIGHBOURS AND ITS OWN MOTHER ABOVE IS  
UNFORTUNATE’: INCOHERENT BUILDINGS

Simpsons was purpose-built on a razed site in the 1930s and apart from an extension in Jermyn Street during the 1960s, its façades and interiors remained remarkably unaltered. This architectural coherence marked it out as an exception in the West End street scene where most shops incorporated building work of different dates and styles. Indeed, the nature of landowning and the high concentration of buildings within London’s centre made complete sites on which to start from scratch a rare commodity: a large number of shops were curious amalgams, replicating the patchwork of the West End street within their façades and structures.

There were alternatives to complete rebuilding. The method of gradual spatial development of department stores, absorbing neighbouring sites building by building, has already been outlined. Sometimes blocks would be refaced to conceal the internal jumble, as Harrods had done periodically, [Figure 6.17] or buildings could be substantially rebuilt, as was the case with Peter Jones, which still incorporated older buildings of 1889 and 1895 in Symons Street, and the 1893 building by Mackmurdo in Cadogan gardens. The Crabtree design itself was actually carried out in several phases between the late 1920s and 1960s, each portion of the façade slightly different, allowing the evolutionary development to be read from the surface of the store.<sup>61</sup> John Lewis in Oxford Street moved to the neighbouring former D. H. Evans site in 1935, following complicated property negotiations with the numerous tenants and owners within the island block. Nonetheless, during the remainder of the 1930s, business was conducted partly in existing Victorian buildings on Oxford Street, and partly in the newly rebuilt rear block that faced Cavendish Square. This part was mainly the work of William Crabtree with Slater, Moberly and Uren, but René Coulon was employed to design the recessed shop windows<sup>62</sup> and Franz Singer was responsible for the restaurant. The result was a building with a varied visual identity, which resisted clear

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<sup>60</sup> F. E. Bennett A.R.I.B.A. ‘The Shop’, *The Builder* 1 February 1929, 240.

<sup>61</sup> The various phases of building are described in detail in Calladine, ‘“A paragon of lucidity and taste”’, 7-28.

<sup>62</sup> *Cabinet Maker*, 18 March 1939, 458.



definition according to the standard conventions of dating and authorship.

The architectural approach to department stores differed significantly from smaller shops, which comprised only the lowest floor or floors, with separately leased offices or residential accommodation above. A survey of architectural journals of the 1930s reveals that the bulk of architectural commissions in the retail sector consisted of a combination of shopfront redesign, usually of the ground and first floor of the façade, and an interior refit. These projects included Beresford Pite's new south frontage for the Burlington Arcade, Maxwell Fry's electricity showroom in Sloane Street, Misha Black's Kardomah Café in Piccadilly and Ernő Goldfinger's shop for Abbatt Toys in Wimpole Street. [Figure 6.18] The professional press frequently published surveys of recent shopfronts, isolating this part of retail design through text and illustration.<sup>63</sup> This architectural technique and journalistic approach to retail architecture inevitably contributed to a distinctly disjointed treatment of different elements of the building. Much of the debate about retail architecture, particularly the impact of Modern architecture, centred on this issue of fracturing.

*Commercial Art* reported 'Circumstances will dictate whether it is feasible to preserve, in a new shopfront, a measure of harmony with existing premises above. To do so to any extent practically rules out certain types of modern design; and the tendency, here as abroad, is to disregard what is above the fascia level ...'<sup>64</sup> The author believed that the decision to impose architectural coherence to shopfront makeovers was influenced by different national architectural cultures, and that in this the English street scene differed from German counterparts where a 'clean shave of effete detail' on the upper floors commonly accompanied a new shopfront. Architect F. E. Bennett writing in *The Builder* suggested that the status of retail architecture was seriously compromised by this disjuncture,

The shop, to have a complete personality, must stand alone as a self-contained structure, expressing itself in plan, section, and elevation like any other building, neither borrowing nor lending in its form more than is necessary for the sake of good manners. Such a condition ... rarely exists except in the large stores and in the stands (or shops) of a trade exhibition where each exhibiting firm has a self-contained area in which to spread. The regular kind of shop, taking up ... a small part of the bulk of a large and prominent building, carries on an existence of two distinct entities, the one of the show exterior on the street front, and the other of its selling and stacking space sunk into the depth

<sup>63</sup> See for example 'Perfumes, Flowers, Clothes and Art: Some Recent Paris Shopfronts – II', *The Architect and Building News*, 27 March 1931, 445-8; 'Shopfronts', *The Architectural Review*, July 1935, 25-7.

<sup>64</sup> *Commercial Art*, October 1931, 146.



of the building behind; the former being depended on to perform the function of expressing character and attracting customers.<sup>65</sup>

Charles Reilly was even more direct in his review of the new Jaeger shopfront in Regent Street,

With its big scale it tells very well across the street ... That in doing so it kills its neighbours and its own mother above is unfortunate, but they themselves are architectural unfortunates with none of the honesty and simplicity of this new child of theirs. Still, I cannot help being a little sorry for them, wicked as they are.<sup>66</sup>

In contrast, a review in the *Architect and Building News*, of Emberton's work for Style and Mantle viewed separate architectural treatment of the shop and upper building not only as an accepted convention, but as the most appropriate Modern approach:

This newly-equipped shop ... does not take its architectural tone from the structure to which it belongs, but represents an essay in the 'modernist' manner. This is not to say, however, that there is any discord between the two styles, because the modernity is principally displayed in the interior of the shop, and the shop windows, although related to the façade, are yet enclosed within a stone framework designed by the architect of the main building.<sup>67</sup>

Whilst this article indicated that a juxtaposition of styles was not necessarily problematic for Modernist architecture, shopfront renovation projects inevitably frequently raised the problem of the operation of architecture as an applied style, disassociated from the original fabric, although, again, this 'architectural dishonesty' was not consistently condemned. An article entitled 'Camouflaging the Victorian Shop' described Dryad's move to a new site in Bloomsbury Street. A veneer of smooth duck-egg and lemon green paint, silver-grey plywood, Ruboleum and chrome was applied to an existing Victorian interior which featured cast iron columns and 'the usual poor fittings' so that 'a completely new covering has been given to the inside of this building, nor is a suspicion of Victorianism allowed to peep through - an example to those with Victorian shops.'<sup>68</sup>

The separate treatment of the shopfront and building above suggests that each part was read separately within the street scene. The relationship between these components, and

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<sup>65</sup> F. E. Bennett A.R.I.B.A. 'The Shop' *The Builder*, 1 February 1929, 240.

<sup>66</sup> C. H. Reilly, 'Shopfronts', *Architectural Review*, July 1935, 27.

<sup>67</sup> *Architect and Building News*, 22 August 1930, 242.

<sup>68</sup> *Commercial Art and Industry*, December 1933, 238-39.



their different engagement with the fleeting fashionable cultures of the West End, informed the debate over the status of retail architecture, explored in the following chapter. It should be noted here, however, that shop design was always a question of balancing the need for modernity with architectural coherence. Although one strand of architectural opinion believed that the two were irreconcilable, often impeccably Modern architects allowed the former to take priority. For example, the *Architect and Building News* reported on architect Maxwell Fry’s electricity showroom in Regent Street, that as ‘it seemed to the architect that for a building concerned with electricity, this façade should be contemporary in every sense of the word, the design has been disassociated from the existing stone front and recessed within the building.’<sup>69</sup>

## CONTROLLING AND CONTESTING ARCHITECTURAL CHANGE: PLANNING REGULATIONS

Piecemeal patterns of development in the 1930s West End suggest that store owners, and the novelty-seeking consumer cultures they nurtured and were driven by, had a free rein in determining the area’s architectural character during the 1930s. Nonetheless, resistance did exist to unchecked development. This part of the chapter argues that the planning process and the burgeoning conservation movement were the two most important mechanisms in the period for curtailing commercial excesses and for negotiating the balance between old and new. These attempts to control and resist architectural change in the retail sector of the metropolis provide a commentary on attitudes towards fashionable consumption cultures, revealing concerns about their class and gender connotations. Nostalgia for old buildings and the desire to control modernity through planning regulatory systems were of course not new impulses, but the character of the contest within this period was significant: it was not necessarily architectural change in itself which was to be resisted and controlled, but more specifically fashionable consumption and the Modern.

As mentioned in Part I, the administration of London had been historically complex. This was reflected in planning regulations relating to retail architecture, which constituted a veritable minefield. Bryan and Norman Westwood complained, ‘it is quite impossible for the ordinary architect to keep pace with the detailed rules which are continually being

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<sup>69</sup> *Architect and Building News*, 11 March 1935, 303.



changed.’<sup>70</sup> In 1937, the regulations concerning signage alone were governed by the 1839 Metropolitan Police Act, the 1847 Town Police Clauses Act, the 1847 Towns Improvement Act, the 1925 Public Health Act and the 1932 Town and Country Planning Act.<sup>71</sup> In addition to these, Simpsons and Peter Jones had to contend with the stipulations of their respective landowners: the Crown Estate and Cadogan Estate.

Such restrictions shaped the design of the built environment in significant ways, repeatedly bemoaned by the architectural press. The *Architects’ Journal* reported on the ‘limitations’ of the new D. H. Evans shop in Oxford Street, which resulted from the planning restrictions, implying that if unfettered, the architect would have been able to design a better and more functional building:

Building designed to the London Building Act Amendments in which floor areas up to 40,000 sq.ft. are allowed. Special conditions of consent were given for general construction, height, and canopy over pavement. The cubic capacity of any compartment is within 500,000 cu.ft. As the L.B.A. requires a vertical component to be cut off from a horizontal one, the staircase and lift halls are shut off from the floors they serve. The L.C.C. would not allow the basement to be used as a selling area.<sup>72</sup>

At Simpsons, fire regulations meant the plan could not maximise ‘openness’ and communication between departments: each floor was partially divided into three by its display fittings and concealed sliding partitions, the loss of continuity felt to be preferable to enclosing the stairs.<sup>73</sup> The structure was even more fundamentally compromised: Ind describes the effect of entanglements with the LCC over Simpsons’ proposed steel frame which resulted in changes that completely destroyed its innovative nature:

Unhappily, this was too sophisticated a system for the administrators of London’s Building Bye Laws. Samuely [the engineer] had proposed two welded plate girders, one at first and one at second floor level, restraining them, by completing the rectangle, at the supports. The London County Council requested that the two plate girders, which had already been fabricated, be freed of that end restraint. As by this action they were rendered incapable of carrying their intended load, the elegance of Samuely’s structure was quite negated, and additional, simply supported, plate girders

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<sup>70</sup> Westwood, Bryan and Norman, *Smaller Retail Shops*, London: The Architectural Press, 1937, 32

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>72</sup> *Architects’ Journal* September 15 1938, 428.

<sup>73</sup> *Industrial Arts*, Summer 1936, 93.



had to be inserted at every floor – and, the final indignity, had to be riveted. The welding machine, heavily booked, had by this time moved on.<sup>74</sup>

Part III discusses how lit signage, so crucial for the Modern shop, was also a sticking point in planning terms.

Lawrence Neal complained, ‘The Building Acts ... play a large part in architectural “losses”, and in London in particular stereotype the internal disposition of a store.’<sup>75</sup> Department store archives certainly reveal the frustrations of owners and architects over these restrictions, which were seen to stand in the way of business. Stamp makes the point that the powers given to local authorities under the Town and Country Planning Act of 1932 enabling them to prohibit any building ‘likely seriously to injure the amenity of a locality’ were largely used against Modern Movement houses.<sup>76</sup> Indeed, Curtis has suggested that this lack of integration of Modernism into State concerns was a particular feature of British Modernism, in contrast to the Scandinavian experience.<sup>77</sup> In her examination of the authorities’ control of Regent Street architecture earlier in the twentieth century, Rappaport uncovered an attempt to contain and limit femininity and consumption cultures.<sup>78</sup> Similarly, 1930s attempts at regulation, usually articulated through a rhetoric of ‘public safety’, can be read as an implicit attempt to regulate the modernity of a building, and its associated consumer cultures.

However, it should be noted that planning regulations *were* changing in the period to take account of modern retail buildings. For example, *The Times* reported how the London Building (Amendment) Act of 1935 had enabled permission to be granted to novel building types, including glazed elevations.<sup>79</sup> Additionally, the softening of regulations regarding canopies projecting over pavements proved extremely popular. A view of a beleaguered architectural profession should in any case not be given too much credence: the architectural process had long involved responding creatively to the problems of a particular site. The distinctive curve of Peter Jones was after all born of just such a requirement to build in relation to the street’s traffic.

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<sup>74</sup> Ind, *Emberton*, 31.

<sup>75</sup> Lawrence E. Neal, *Retailing and the Public*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1932, 73.

<sup>76</sup> Stamp, *Britain in the Thirties*, 5.

<sup>77</sup> Curtis, *Modern Architecture since 1900*, 329 – 330.

<sup>78</sup> Rappaport, ‘Art, Commerce, or Empire?’ 94-117.

<sup>79</sup> *The Times*, Supplement, 21 March 1939.



In the end, the most that planners could usually achieve was to displace rather than stamp out commercial impulses. For example during the earlier part of the twentieth century, the lengthy uncertainty over the Regent Street rebuilding, and the debates over the amount of individuality the store owners could expect to be allowed to express in the rebuilt design, led many to build on Oxford Street instead, where they had more control over their architectural identity.<sup>80</sup> As was shown in Part I, this permanently affected the character of this street, as it became a gaudy display of the individual identities of the shops that were located there.

### THE CONSERVATION MOVEMENT

The other force restraining the commercial impulses of retailers, and also influencing changes in planning practice, was the rise of the movement for architectural conservation, which drew together a group of architects and architectural critics. One articulation of this was the campaign for contextual new architecture. This was a hugely important strand within 1930s architectural debate, and fed into arguments for the value of powerful overarching planning regulations in preserving unity, and therefore the character, of an area.<sup>81</sup> Although the Part I has established that this ‘character’ was also a valuable commodity to West End retailers, they were repeatedly portrayed as a serious threat to the architectural integrity of the metropolis. The fiercest controversy occasioned by shop building in the 1930s was centred on the Rural Amenities Bill of 1930 and Town and Country Planning Act of 1932. The primary scenes of conflict were not, however, the shopping streets of the West End, but the high streets of country towns and villages, with the homogenous and ill-designed shopfronts of multiples cast as the biggest villains. This is in line with Matless’s description of how these wrangles were bound up in the redefinition of England in the period, which encompassed both a rural idyll *and* a rational modern metropolis.<sup>82</sup> Patrick Abercrombie was a key critic of the multiple shop, ‘Their brutal stock fronts botched on to older buildings, cutting half-way through the first floor windows, bring a shout of town vulgarity that drowns the quiet charm of the place.’<sup>83</sup> *Commercial Art’s* commentary on this debate highlighted the importance attached to distinctiveness of place: ‘It is the mere fact that the ugly standardised fronts of certain

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<sup>80</sup> Discussed in Rappaport, ‘Art, Commerce, or Empire?’ 105.

<sup>81</sup> Discussed in Watkin, ‘Architectural Writing in the Thirties’, 87.

<sup>82</sup> David Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, London: Reaktion, 1998.

<sup>83</sup> Quoted in A. Edward Hammond, ‘Multiples and Amenities’, *Commercial Art*, February 1930, 60.



multiple establishments are repeated in every town that brings their offensive - one had almost said insolent - shop exteriors into greater execration.’<sup>84</sup>

It is argued that in the West End, architectural renewal and stylistic novelty were more accepted, because these were part of the character of these streets. The architecture of ‘Old London’ was certainly felt to be an important part of the identity of the metropolis, but it was located elsewhere, around Westminster and parts of the City. Nonetheless, some concerns about threatened contextuality did find their way into the West End; these were articulated in terms of the need to control the commercial impulses of retailers who were blinded by their own competitiveness to the value to their businesses of an architecturally unified West End. A. Trystan Edwards, who had written the infamous *Good and Bad Manners in Architecture* in 1924, persistently cast the retailer as a threat: ‘There is no question that the charm of Old Regent Street ... helped to bring great wealth to the shopkeepers, but this result was attained only because they were willing or obliged to accept architectural guidance from a civic designer of great genius’.<sup>85</sup> He claimed that the individualistic impulse of shop owners to use architecture to make their business stand out from the crowd was self-defeating, warning that ‘Shopkeepers can best hunt in packs’, architecturally as well as geographically.<sup>86</sup>

These debates were ostensibly about the lack of a contextual approach in new shop design rather than modernity in itself, for example A. Edward Hammond wrote: ‘Bond Street and Whitechapel High Street each demand proportionate study of local surroundings on the part of the shop builders. Even the crown-owned and newly built Regent Street, which should have been well able to take care of its amenities, is not free from discordant shopfronts.’<sup>87</sup> [Figure 6.19] A. Trystan Edwards felt that Modern shop design was intrinsically incompatible with architectural neighbourliness, arguing that it disrupted scale, and especially the scale and shape of fenestration, resulting in ‘architectural chaos’ in the street scene.<sup>88</sup> There was much frustration amongst architects and the proponents of Modernism about the way planners and landowners wielded their power to prevent or

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> A. Trystan Edwards, *The Architecture of Shops*, London: Chapman and Hall, 1933, 27.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>87</sup> A. Edward Hammond, ‘Multiples and Amenities’, *Commercial Art* February 1930, 60.

<sup>88</sup> A. Trystan Edwards, *The Architecture of Shops*, London: Chapman and Hall, 1933, 22-3, 40-43.



restrict Modern architecture, adopting this rhetoric about context.<sup>89</sup> MOMA’s catalogue summarised this view,

Building authorities are still unsympathetic and arbitrary to the point of whimsy in their rulings ... There is no question ... that those who think of contemporary building primarily in terms of amenity and sentimental consideration for the existing monuments of the past are neither sympathetic to nor understanding of modern architecture. ... they make little or no distinction between the most outrageous pseudo-Egyptian factories, and the many modern houses ... whose architectural quality would be distinguished anywhere in the world.<sup>90</sup>

But the tension over rebuilding cannot be simply mapped onto a division between Modern and historicist schools of architectural thinking; it was a much more complex issue. As Stamp points out, there was significant crossover of both ideas and individuals between the Georgian Group and the radical Modernist MARS Group.<sup>91</sup> For example, the Georgian Group’s membership spanned both the likes of A. Trystan Edwards and Frederick Etchells, translator of Le Corbusier and architect of Modern London headquarters for Crawfords advertising firm. As Part II explores, both parties within the preservationist camp shared a fundamental antipathy for, and misunderstanding of, modern consumer cultures. Blending with surroundings was bound to be problematic when competition, niche marketing and therefore complex advertising strategies involving architecture, display and novelty were integral to those cultures. However, the way stores were designed show that the relationship between the store and the life of the street was addressed very seriously, as discussed in the following section.

A new attitude to London’s architectural heritage was a current running through much of the tussle over building Modern shops in the West End. There was, of course, a tradition of nostalgia for ‘old London’, which since the Victorian era had been expressed through journalism chronicling its demise. Whereas nineteenth and early twentieth-century journalism in this genre had been flavoured by a recognition of the city’s ‘Babylonian’ decay and need to rebuild, 1930s nostalgia galvanised into the burgeoning conservation

<sup>89</sup> For example, Lubetkin wrote scathingly about the attitude of the building industry and planning authorities towards Modern architecture in Britain, which was stunting the development of the movement. *American Architect and Architecture*, February 1937, 29-30. Discussed in Dean, *The Thirties*, 138-9 and Charlotte and Tom Benton, ‘Architecture: Contrasts of a decade’.

<sup>90</sup> *Modern Architecture in England*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1937, 25.

<sup>91</sup> Gavin Stamp, ‘The Art of Keeping One Jump Ahead: Conservation Societies in the Twentieth Century’, Michael Hunter (ed.), *Preserving the Past: The Rise of Heritage in Modern Britain*, Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1996, 84.



movement which sought to preserve historical fabric and local character in the face of the commercial interests which were seen to threaten them.<sup>92</sup>

[Figure 6.20] Books and articles were published which recorded vanishing ‘old London’: its threatened buildings, its habitués. For example, Gaunt’s *London Promenade* set out its agenda, to draw attention to the special, vulnerable nature of London: ‘the native, indigenous London, with its folk-songs and folk-humour, its peculiar architecture, its superb indifference to the rest of the world, its countless strange types ... . This is the London which (alas!) seems to be passing away, and this the author faithfully chronicles.’

<sup>93</sup> Whilst acknowledging a longer tradition of this kind of writing, *London Promenade*’s author made a claim for the modernity of this form of nostalgia, related to its close alignment with the fleeting nature of contemporary urban life,

One may find some analogy to *London Promenade* in those books of lively drawings popular at the beginning of the last century, *The Microcosm of London*, by Pugin and Rowlandson, for instance. From another point of view, by its swift movement from place to place and the varied and overlapping impressions which it contains, it suggests the characteristically modern medium of the film.<sup>94</sup>

The loss of ‘old London’ was also intimately connected to the unstoppable progress within modern life:

the Old Empire [theatre] is to be seen cowering between a drapery store and the Gambrinus, awaiting its fate. The redoubt of old-fashioned amusement has been stormed and the contractor’s sign is hung out like an epitaph ... Some of the atmosphere of London is being carted away in wheelbarrows ... Born 1887, this theatre speedily associated itself with the dissolute young men about town amongst whom its dashing appearance and reckless manners gave it the position of a leader. It suddenly became old, having blazed away its spendthrift youth in a very short time and quietly departed this life to the regret of such of its boon companions as survived in the year, 1927.<sup>95</sup>

The inter-war years were pivotal in channelling nostalgia for old London into campaigns about planning processes and into raising public awareness of the need for active protection for architectural heritage. The architectural preservation movement gathered

<sup>92</sup> This aspect of architectural writing is discussed in Watkin, ‘Architectural Writing in the Thirties’.

<sup>93</sup> William Gaunt, *London Promenade*, London: The Studio, 1930, 2

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 9-10.



momentum, the founding of the Georgian Group in 1937 constituting a significant event.<sup>96</sup> During these years, the recording of threatened London architecture increasingly revealed a preservationist rather than nostalgic motivation, through the work of the Survey of London<sup>97</sup> and campaigns for Georgian buildings staged by the *Architectural Review*. As well as the City churches and Waterloo Bridge, particular elements of West End’s architecture were identified as important for these new conservationists. These included the West End’s great family mansions, such as Devonshire House in Piccadilly, which had been demolished in 1924,<sup>98</sup> but also its shopping heritage. The rebuilding of Nash’s Regent Street was frequently cited as an important lesson, articulated in terms of the loss of historic character as much as the ‘unneighbourliness’ of the new.

This ‘preservationism’ found its way into the text of tourist guidebooks, Morton’s guide of 1937 still mourning lost Regent Street,

In 1925 began the demolition of Nash’s Regent Street, when London watched a street full of character come down, block by block, to be replaced by the American architecture which in another few years will take the last surviving shred of character from London. Liberty’s Tudor building in this street, heavily beamed with old oak taken from wooden battleships, is becoming to look more like a revolt than an anachronism.<sup>99</sup>

Guidebooks therefore adopted the role of recorders of the vulnerable fabric of a historic city, preserving it for posterity through text. They also promoted a reading of the West End that favoured the ‘characterful’ old over the ‘destructive’ new.

[Figure 6.21] However, it was still overwhelmingly Georgian or Regency architecture of ‘quality’ that formed the basis of campaigns. There was little significant opposition, for instance, to the demolition of the assortment of little shops of the early nineteenth century that littered the West End’s main streets, such as those awaiting demolition in Piccadilly in 1937. [Figure 6.22] The architecture of traditional masculine routes, like their associated cultures, proved particularly vulnerable at this time, where such buildings were concentrated. The print shop, tobacconists, and boot and shoemakers captured in William

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<sup>96</sup> The demolition of historic buildings during the 1930s and the associated rise of the conservation movement is described in detail in Jane Fawcett (ed.), *The Future of the Past: Attitudes to Conservation 1174-1974*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1976; Hermione Hobhouse, *Lost London: A Century of Demolition and Decay*, London: Macmillan, 1971; Stamp, ‘The art of keeping one jump ahead’.

<sup>97</sup> See *London Survey’d: The Work of the Survey of London 1894-94*, London: RCHME, 1994.

<sup>98</sup> Discussed and illustrated in Stamp, ‘The art of keeping one jump ahead’, 80 - 81.

<sup>99</sup> H. V. Morton, *London: a Guide*, London: Methuen 1937.



A. Clarke’s photograph of Savile Passage in 1933 as part of the ‘The Smallest Shops in London’ series were all demolished by 1938. Neither were more substantial Victorian buildings fought for: the demise of the Royal Geological Museum was regretted, but its structural unsoundness was accepted as terminal more readily than it would have been in recent years.<sup>100</sup>

The targets of this campaign were significant. In 1937, the *Architectural Review* published Robert Byron’s stinging attack, ‘How We Celebrate the Coronation’. In this piece, it was not the Modern architects who were cast as the villains, but the Church, local and national Government, big landowners and business who were blamed to thoughtless or financially motivated redevelopment: ‘These, in the year of the coronation, 1937, are responsible for the ruin of London, for our humiliation before visitors, and for destroying without hope of recompense many of the nation’s most treasured possessions.’

Despite being cast by the likes of Byron as the villains, the actions of planning authorities in their control of retail architecture can be read as a direct response to the conservationist pressure: whereas in previous eras, the overriding concern of the authorities had been to push through large schemes to improve the city and combat urban decay, during the thirties a sea-change in attitudes towards historical architectural fabric occurred, fostering a different, increasingly cautious, approach to controlling rebuilding. The new attitude was evidenced in planning legislation, including the Ancient Monuments Act of 1931, The Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act of 1933 and the Town and Country Planning Act of 1932, making preservation of important historic buildings easier.<sup>101</sup> One can only speculate as to how the West End would have looked as an unchecked expression of shopping cultures, but the point was that these local, contextual, historical concerns served not only to control and limit, but also to encourage the development of a retail Modernism that was informed by a strong relationship with place.

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<sup>100</sup> See the articles on the museum in the ‘Obituaries of Buildings’ series, *The Architect and Building News*, Supplements to 1 September 1933 and 6 October 1933.

<sup>101</sup> Hobhouse, *Lost London*, 9.



## WEST END MODERNISM

It has been suggested, then, that in the context of the 1930s West End, the Modern Shop would have been striking and unusual, as such buildings were still the exception rather than the rule within the street scene. There has also been discussion of how the ‘un-contextual’ nature of Modern retail architecture was a focal point for its critics. However, a study of Peter Jones and Simpsons shows that not only were stores such as these infused by the history of their sites, as outlined earlier, they actively built a strong relationship with the existing built landscape, allowing the buildings to engage directly with the West End. Just as West End shops sat within a series of different shopping routes, they also operated within various architectural networks. The symbolic qualities of shop façades made them particularly important in forging these complex geographical relationships and, indeed, constructing new notions of this place.

Store architects and management teams often went on ‘research trips’ to gain inspiration from the best foreign Modern shops.<sup>102</sup> [Figures 6.23 and 6.24] The obvious international influences in the designs of stores such as Simpsons and Peter Jones were instantly recognised. For instance, *Store* magazine reported that Peter Jones was ‘Definitely inspired by the work on the Continent of such architects as Erich Mendelsohn.’<sup>103</sup> However, this was not just a question of influence, but of the situation of these West End shops within an international, particularly European and North American, landscape of Modernist shops.<sup>104</sup> This landscape was mapped out within a literature on foreign shops published in Britain. The Westwoods reference an extensive European literature, including Louis Parnes’ *Bauten des Einzelhandels* of 1934, Adolph Schumacher’s *Ladenbau* of 1934 and Roger Poulain’s *Boutiques* of 1931.<sup>105</sup> *Studio* publishers were responsible for a series of books on the Modern arts in the 1930s aimed at a crossover professional and popular market. In this series, Herbert Hoffmann’s *Modern Interiors* of 1930 had a substantial section on shops and exhibition interiors, with examples chosen from Berlin, Vienna, Amsterdam,

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<sup>102</sup> Crabtree’s recent visit to Germany and Holland was reported in the Minutes of the Peter Jones Ltd Subcommittee for Design, 7 June 1934. John Lewis Partnership Archive. Alexander Simpson urged Joseph Emberton to join him on a visit to the United States in a letter of 20 May 1935. Simpsons Archive.

<sup>103</sup> *Store*, October 1936, 4.

<sup>104</sup> A detailed discussion of the relationship between British and International Modernism is beyond the scope of this thesis, but is examined in more detail elsewhere, for example by Henry-Russell Hitchcock’s essay ‘Modern Architecture in England in *Modern Architecture in England*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1937, 25; Dean, *The Thirties*, 9; Stamp, *Britain in the Thirties*; Saler, *The Avant-Garde in Inter-war England*.

<sup>105</sup> Louis Parnes, *Bauten des Einzelhandels*, Zurich: Orell Füssli, 1934; Adolph Schumacher, *Ladenbau*, Stuttgart: Julius Hoffmann, 1934 and Roger Poulain, *Boutiques*, Paris: Vincent Freal et Cie, 1931, cited in Westwood, Bryan and Norman, *Smaller Retail Shops*, London: The Architectural Press, 1937.



Stockholm, LA, Cologne, Madrid, Copenhagen, Munich, Hamburg, The Hague and Zurich.<sup>106</sup> This context points not only to concepts of Modernism which located it primarily within the capitals of the Western world, but can also be seen to be related directly to the positioning of the West End as an international shopping centre, discussed in Part I.

These international references contributed to the sense that Modernist shops, and indeed Modern architecture in general, were ‘foreign’ within the British context. This was noted by *The Builder* in 1929, ‘Following on the precedents of Paris and Berlin a break is being made with all tradition, and new shopfronts of what at first seem to be strangely exotic design are appearing in our best streets.’<sup>107</sup> This foreignness was exaggerated by the attribution of Modernism to the influx of prominent émigré architects, including Mendelsohn, Gropius, Lubetkin, and Goldfinger.<sup>108</sup> Whilst, particularly at the beginning of the decade, there was a sense that British Modern shop design lagged behind its foreign counterparts, it is argued that by the late 1930s, the impact of buildings like Simpson Piccadilly and Peter Jones went beyond shock-value at their rarity, strangeness and novelty; they had succeeded in fashioning a more local Modernism.

Within a British context, the architecture of Simpsons and Peter Jones was definitely predominantly associated with the urban, and, specifically, with London.<sup>109</sup> As MOMA’s catalogue explained: ‘Since the practice of modern architecture is concentrated in London, its patrons have been chiefly metropolitan.’<sup>110</sup> Books and journalism concerned with the design of shops betrayed a keenness to distinguish between architecture suitable for suburbia, small towns and city centres, a theme which was connected to the movement for contextual architecture described earlier in this chapter.<sup>111</sup> James has described how Mendelsohn’s Modernist stores for Schocken constituted significant urban design, which enabled the company ‘to move beyond the mere goal of selling to impose order upon the urban chaos spawned by modern retailing.’<sup>112</sup> Similarly, the architectural press assessed Peter Jones and Simpsons as successful ‘townscaping’. The *Architectural Review* described Peter Jones as setting ‘a standard of straightforward urban design that, in

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<sup>106</sup> Herbert Hoffmann, *Modern Interiors*, London: Studio, 1930.

<sup>107</sup> F. E. Bennett A.R.I.B.A. ‘The Shop’, *The Builder*, 1 February 1929, 240.

<sup>108</sup> Charlotte Benton, *A Different World. Emigre Architects in Britain 1928-1956*, London: RIBA Heinz Gallery, 1995; Dean, *The Thirties*, 14.

<sup>109</sup> The usefulness of contrasting Modernism’s internationalising rhetoric with a picture of national and regional diversity is suggested in Curtis, *Modern Architecture since 1900*.

<sup>110</sup> *Modern Architecture in England*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1937, 31.

<sup>111</sup> See for example A Trystan Edwards, *The Architecture of Shops*, London: Chapman and Hall, 1933.

<sup>112</sup> James, ‘From Messel to Mendelsohn’, 253.



disorderly London, badly needs to be maintained.’<sup>113</sup>

Modernism’s relationship with the immediate West End context provided a viewing mechanism for Peter Jones and Simpsons, which is of interest to this thesis. The planning regulations discussed earlier in this chapter were responsible for a certain level of contextual design. These regulations shaped the buildings’ volumes, for example restricting their height and requiring top floors to be set back from the building line to accord with their neighbours. But more importantly the façade was also required to ‘relate’ to its locality. The issue of the façade was a difficult one for Modernist theory, but this was often the place where a sense of the locality was most strongly reflected. At Simpsons, the Crown Commissioners stipulated that the façade should be of traditional Portland stone. The store’s façade signage was closely negotiated with the LCC, so as not to upset the balance of Piccadilly and Jermyn Street. MOMA understood building authorities’ opposition to Modernism’s rendered and concrete surfaces,

In the London area, various types of stucco and cement rendering have proved terrifyingly receptive to the grime of metropolitan air. Doubtless they might in the course of several decades reach that ultimate blackness which is not altogether unpleasant in the older brick architecture of London. But after a year or two the effect is extremely disagreeable and a very bad advertisement for modern architecture.<sup>114</sup>

It is argued here that in taking account of these local concerns, the buildings were not simply making a virtue of necessity, but had something to gain from infusing the designs with the character of the West End. [Figure 6.25] Echoing the individual identity of specific streets within the West End was seen as important to business, as the *Architect and Building News* noted,

Bond Street is renowned as the street in which are sold small objects of great value ... Messrs. Boots, while selling nothing at fantastically high prices ... have echoed Bond Street’s distinctive note in their new shop. The outside is faced in Zola marble with black fluted columns between the showcase-like windows ... this design is eminently suited to Bond Street, and would be out of place in many provincial and almost all suburban surroundings.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> *Architectural Review*, June 1936, 269.

<sup>114</sup> *Modern Architecture in England*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1937, 34.

<sup>115</sup> *Architect and Building News*, 20 June 1930, 788-9.



The way Modern design was used differently in the various parts of the West End can be seen to relate directly to the profile of the consumption cultures in each street and route. Indeed there was much debate about the class-inflected nature of Modernism, for example in MOMA’s catalogue,

The immense popularity of the London Zoo buildings testifies to a wide appreciation among classes who have at the present no very direct control of architecture; stores such as Simpsons and apartments such as Atheneum Court, both in Piccadilly, indicate that the upper classes form no frozen opposition. The discrimination of the lower middle classes is difficult to gauge, but the probability is that if the speculative builders would employ good modern architects, their products would sell as well or better than they do now.<sup>116</sup>

At Simpsons, the association between design and the class-infused nature of the street was emphasised by the elegance, pared down simplicity of line and also the quality of materials. [Figure 6.4] It was in striking contrast to the same architect’s shop of 1938 for His Masters Voice in Oxford Street, which used a more adventurous, eye-catching range of modern materials such as shiny Vitrolite and glass brick. Simpsons’ architecture helped to suggest that Oxford Street’s Mr and Mrs Everyman would not be overly welcomed.

A close study of Simpsons reveals that the store was very carefully designed to relate in a more complex way to the intricate nuances within the street network; concurrently reflecting the different strands of the West End’s consumer cultures. [Figure 6.13] Simpsons’ façade was not so ‘contextual’ that it blurred with its neighbours; far from it. The striking Modernist design stood out from the flanking buildings on Piccadilly, prioritising a message about the store’s modernity, and permanently transforming the street scene. Both Simpsons and Peter Jones were singled out and ascribed a transforming role within the urban by *The Times* in its article, ‘Changing London: Examples of New Building’.<sup>117</sup> Simpsons was described by the *Architect and Building News* as ‘an object lesson to future rebuilders in Piccadilly’.<sup>118</sup> The article continued:

Piccadilly has grown from a street of private palaces, through a phase of hotels and museums to its present condition as a great shopping thoroughfare. Its architecture up to now has always hankered after the palace period, and latterly the palaces themselves have been outdone, not merely in size but in grandiosity by the commercial buildings. The Wolseley Building, Devonshire House and the new

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<sup>116</sup> *Modern Architecture in England*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1937, 31.

<sup>117</sup> *The Times*, 31 October, 1936, 16.

<sup>118</sup> *Architect and Building News*, 8 May 1936, 155.



block at the corner of Sackville Street are all richly academic, and Simpsons is the first building to state in modern terms the modern purpose of the street.<sup>119</sup>

The Piccadilly façade also possessed a scale, expressiveness and fashionability that helped align Simpsons with the flagship fashion stores of the West End from Piccadilly Circus, along Regent Street and Oxford Street, and assured its place on their route. [Figure 6.26] The rear elevation operated on a different register. The design here was altogether quieter, and the quality of materials and luxuriously styled elegance of both exterior and interior retained something of Jermyn Street’s exclusivity, whose associations of quality and tradition the store wished to preserve. But the unavoidable modernity of the design simultaneously drew attention to the difference between Simpsons and its Jermyn Street neighbours, identifying it as the home of a distinctively modern masculinity, and casting it as the future of menswear retailing. This complex architectural double-sidedness reflected and constructed the identity of the ‘Simpsons man’ in an age that was witnessing the increased democratisation of fashion, as will be explored in Part IV.

[Figure 6.27] Peter Jones transformed the street scene in a more clear-cut way. It had a different relationship with its neighbours through its development of nearly an entire island site. The footprint responded to the historical line of the street, its expressive curve made connections with an important element within English Modernist design, as noted by MOMA, ‘The bold use of curved forms... can be seen almost at its best in the ingenious adaptation of the Peter Jones Store to a difficult site on Sloane Square’.<sup>120</sup> The shop stamped modernity and modern retail cultures on Sloane Square in a way that had not hitherto been seen. The *Evening News* reported, ‘Now that something like the upper works of the Queen Mary has risen in Sloane Square little of its Victorian complacency remains.’<sup>121</sup>

We have seen that consumer cultures constituted an important impulse for transformation in the design of the West End, and influenced what form these designs would take. They did not just reflect consumer culture’s insatiable desire for modernity, but were strongly related to the West End environment, relating in a particular way to its streets and history. Thus this chapter contributes to an understanding of 1930s architectural Modernism that allows for variety, and for local as well as international associations.

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> *Modern Architecture in England*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1937, 37

<sup>121</sup> *The Evening News*, 26 May 1936.



## 7.

# ‘SOMETHING OF A REVOLUTION HAD TAKEN PLACE IN ENGLISH ARCHITECTURE’: THE MODERN SHOP

The new Simpsons and Peter Jones buildings opened in 1936, at a crucial moment in the history of Modernism when, after a rather slow start, English Modern architecture was flourishing at home, and lauded abroad.<sup>1</sup> This shift was noted by many contemporary architectural commentators, for example in Yorke and Penn’s *A Key to Modern Architecture* of 1939.<sup>2</sup> In 1937 the Museum of Modern Art in New York held a seminal exhibition, entitled ‘Modern Architecture in England’. The catalogue declared that a revolution had taken place,

The international Exhibition of Modern Architecture held at the Museum of Modern Art five years ago consisted in the main of buildings in France, Holland, Germany and America. England was barely represented. Today, it is not altogether an exaggeration to say that England leads the world in modern architectural activity. In part this is because Germany has for political reasons dropped from the running and because in France no conspicuous revival of building has yet followed on the depression; but even more it is because of the extraordinary rapidity with which an English school of modern architecture has developed in the last two or three years. ... It was clear that something of a revolution had taken place in English architecture.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The spread of architectural Modernism to Britain and Scandinavia in the 1930s is discussed in Curtis, *Modern Architecture since 1900*, Chapter 19.

<sup>2</sup> F. R. S. Yorke, and Colin Penn, *A Key to Modern Architecture*, 1939.

<sup>3</sup> *Modern Architecture in England*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1937, 25.



There were various additional reasons for this ‘revolution’: there had been an influx of talented and innovative émigré architects and designers from Europe. There were also identifiable shifts in attitudes to the Modern and to the role of architecture in national life. Significantly, Simpsons and Peter Jones were two of the seventy-seven buildings in MOMA’s exhibition, suggesting that shops were key elements within this architectural flowering. Despite being largely ignored by subsequent histories, the Modernism of fashionable consumption thrived in such exhibitions, in the professional periodical press and within the street. Retail architecture provided significant architectural commissions for Britain’s Modern architects, demonstrating and securing the popularity of Modernism during this period and providing London with key Modern landmark buildings, which quickly and enduringly became emblems of an important strand of British modernity.

It is the contention of this thesis that the association between retail and Modernism was not accidental. Chapter 7 examines the reasons why Modernist architecture was adopted by 1930s shops. It did, of course, communicate modernity: a valuable commodity in the world of fashionable consumption. However the chapter addresses the question of whether Modernism was more than simply the latest expression of retail novelty, pragmatically employed by store owners as an advertising strategy.

The complex, troubled and frequently contradictory relationship between retail and architectural Modernism is explored, both within architectural theory and the West End’s built projects, unpicking the anti-consumption rhetoric of the theorists, and tracking the development of a closer engagement between architecture and retail during the 1930s. The argument is made that not only did specific buildings like Simpsons and Peter Jones engage with the businesses they housed, but that particular generic characteristics of Modern architecture were ideally suited to the consumption cultures of the 1930s West End: its experimentality, its communicative register and its complex, if frequently denied, fetishisation of the façade. By identifying this cultural closeness, a picture emerges of a retail Modernism which was permeated by the cultures West End, and which, conversely, contributed to the character of the place in significant ways.



‘AN EXPRESSION IN EVERY WAY OF THE MODERN SPIRIT’

Simpsons and Peter Jones were impeccably Modern: pushing back stylistic, structural and technical boundaries in the West End and housing modern shopping cultures in new kinds of spaces. Externally, both had a particularly striking Modern aesthetic, evidenced in the treatment of surface, glazing and lighting. The care with which these stores were constructed as exercises in Modernism is worth examining, as it reveals the relative importance of architecture to each project, suggesting that shop design was a useful retail strategy related intimately to matters of identity.

Simpsons had the advantage in employing the team with the most exemplary Modern reputation, in an environment where ‘reputation’ was important for securing recognition for buildings. It was designed by Britain’s leading commercial Modern architect, Joseph Emberton, for an enthusiastic and innovative young client, Alexander Simpson. By the time he was given the commission for Simpsons at the age of forty-seven, Emberton had an established practice, and had completed several high profile buildings.<sup>4</sup> His work was also already internationally recognised, featured in the influential book by F. R. Yerbury, *Modern European Buildings* of 1928 alongside that of the internationally renowned Mendelsohn, Dudok, and Perret,<sup>5</sup> and his Royal Corinthian Yacht Club at Burnham-on-Crouch of 1931 was one of very few British Buildings included in the ‘International Exhibition of Modern Architecture’ held at MOMA in 1932.<sup>6</sup> The *Architect and Building News* saw Simpsons as a highly developed, confident work: ‘Compared with Mr. Emberton’s earlier buildings, Simpsons is definitely more mature and shows a surer handling of materials.’<sup>7</sup> Emberton’s reputation was furthermore closely linked to the Modern shop. He had been in practice from 1922 to 1926 with Percy Westwood, architect for Austin Reed, with whom he worked on important commissions including Austin Reed’s Red Lion Square headquarters of 1925 and the Regent Street shop of 1926. He had also designed shopfronts for the chain Lotus and Delta and for Earl and Earl. He was one of only a handful of British architects with such a track record, perhaps only closely rivalled by Louis Blanc, who had been architect for D. H. Evans, Harrods, Swan and Edgar and Kendal Milne in Manchester.

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<sup>4</sup> An account of Emberton’s career is provided in Ind, *Emberton*.

<sup>5</sup> F. R. Yerbury, *Modern European Buildings*, London: V. Gollancz, 1928.

<sup>6</sup> The significance of this exhibition is described in *Modern Architecture in England*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1937, 25 and Henry Matthews, ‘The Promotion of Modern Architecture by the Museum of Modern Art in the 1930s’, *Journal of Design History*, vol.7 no.1, 1994.

<sup>7</sup> *Architect and Building News*, 8 May 1936, 155.



Efforts were made to secure the services of the best professionals for each part of the design. The engineer at Simpsons was Felix Samuely, responsible for the structure of Mendelsohn and Chermayeff’s seminal De la Warr Pavilion at Bexhill. [Figure 4.13] Advertising and additional graphics were by Crawfords, with up and coming designer Ashley Havinden doing much of the work.<sup>8</sup> Former Bauhaus artist László Moholy-Nagy was placed in charge of the display department. Much of the furniture and fittings were designed by Emberton himself and made by Bath Cabinet Makers, the firm of choice for fitting out British Modern buildings. [Figure 7.1] Leather and curved plywood armchairs and plywood tables were by Alvar Aalto, with other chairs by avant-garde manufacturer Pel.<sup>9</sup> Carpets and rugs were by leading designers Marion Dorn<sup>10</sup> and Duncan Miller, along with Havinden and Natasha Kroll, the latter becoming a nationally renowned display expert, in charge of windows at Simpsons for many years.<sup>11</sup> There were even unrealised plans to use sculpture by Eric Gill and Henry Moore.<sup>12</sup> This positions the store amongst a group of high profile, luxury collaborative building projects of the 1930s, which included Broadcasting House and the 1930s refit and extension of Claridges. Like them, Simpsons showcased the best of modern British design, and it did so *because* of its usefulness to business. As the *Advertisers Weekly* commented, ‘What other store owner would have gathered about him the people Alexander Simpson collected? Nobody else, probably because no other man in London is young enough, rich enough, has vision enough.’<sup>13</sup>

The team of Modern designers was put together rather differently at Peter Jones. The building was largely by a hitherto unknown young architect, William Crabtree. Crabtree had trained under Charles Reilly at the Liverpool School, and had worked for Emberton for a year, before being engaged as a research architect for the John Lewis Partnership. Ever

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<sup>8</sup> See the profile of Havinden in *Art and Industry*, November 1938, 191-197; Michael Havinden et al., *Advertising and the Artist: Ashley Havinden*, Edinburgh: National Galleries of Scotland, 2003.

<sup>9</sup> Pel, formerly Practical Equipment Limited, was one of the most important manufacturers of Modern furniture of the period, producing versions of classic European Modern pieces in addition to in-house designs, including those by Oliver Bernard. Other shops were using Pel furniture at the time, including Marshall and Snelgrove and Harvey Nichols. See Simon Jervis’s chapter on furniture in Jennifer Hawkins and Marianne Hollis (eds.), *Thirties: British Art and Design Before the War*, London: Arts Council: 1979; Dennis Sharp, Tim Benton and Barbie Campbell Cole, *Pel and Tubular Steel Furniture of the Thirties*, London: The Architectural Association, 1977.

<sup>10</sup> Mendes notes that Marion Dorn was the foremost Modern carpet designer in Britain in the period. The majority of her work was either for private or commercial clients, with major commissions including the large liners the Queen Mary and the Orion, prestigious hotels such as Claridges and the Berkeley. In 1934 she had a West End shop at 10 Lancashire Court, New Bond Street. Valerie Mendes, ‘Carpets and Furnishing Textiles’ Hawkins, Jennifer, and Hollis, Marianne (eds.) *Thirties: British Art and Design Before the War*, London: Arts Council: 1979, 87, 288.

<sup>11</sup> This is noted in Ind, *Emberton*, 32

<sup>12</sup> Letters from Alexander Simpson to Joseph Emberton, 7 May 1936, 25 October 1935, letter from Joseph Emberton to Alexander Simpson, 9 May 1936, Report of meeting between Alexander Simpson, Joseph Emberton, Maurice Lambert, and Henry Moore 19 December 1935, Simpsons Archive.

<sup>13</sup> Obituary of Alexander Simpson, *Advertisers Weekly*, 27 May 1937.



cautious, the company retained architectural heavyweight Reilly, a late convert to Modernism, as a consultant to mitigate the risk of Crabtree’s inexperience. Established in-house team Slater and Moberly were responsible for all of the working drawings and contract supervision. John Spedan Lewis reassured partners about the quality of the safety net: ‘In the course of his long tenure of that Chair, Professor Reilly gave to [Liverpool] School of Architecture such a reputation that it attracted students ... from all over the world.’<sup>14</sup> There was, however, a less cohesive atmosphere amongst the design and management team from that at Simpsons, which impacted on the commitment of the company to the design.<sup>15</sup>

This did not apparently affect the professional reception of the store adversely. Simpsons and Peter Jones were both immediately and unanimously included within the canon of the best of British Modernist design. Their presence in the MOMA exhibition of 1937 was particularly significant. Matthews has described the radical Modern agenda of MOMA during the 1930s, as under the curatorship of Henry-Russell Hitchcock, Alfred Barr and Philip Johnson, the museum sought to change the nature of American architecture through the promotion of European Modernism.<sup>16</sup> The exhibition featured buildings by the stars of the English Modern architectural scene: Chermayeff, Coates, Fry, Gibberd, Gropius, Mendelsohn, Lubetkin and Yorke. The prominent position of émigré architects in this exhibition further stressed that these shops could hold their own in a European as well as a British context. Simpsons and Peter Jones were also featured in the MARS (Modern Architectural Research) group’s London exhibition of 1938, a home-grown, but more avant-garde curatorial environment.<sup>17</sup>

The two shops were reviewed extensively in the architectural periodical press.<sup>18</sup> They were singled out for attention in the *Architects’ Journal*’s round-up of the best buildings of 1936, in which Tecton’s Penguin Pool was chosen as ‘building of the year’.<sup>19</sup> In 1939, Peter Jones was famously voted best modern building in the *Architects’ Journal*’s poll of

<sup>14</sup> *Gazette of the John Lewis Partnership*, 13 April 1935, 231.

<sup>15</sup> The relationship between the various parties in the design team is discussed in Peter Richmond, *Marketing Modernisms: the Architecture and Influence of Charles Reilly*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2001, 168 - 173.

<sup>16</sup> Matthews, ‘The Promotion of Modern Architecture’, 43 - 59.

<sup>17</sup> The exhibition was held at the New Burlington Galleries in the West End. A report in the *Manchester Guardian* of 14 January 1938 noted the shops’ inclusion.

<sup>18</sup> See for example the reviews of Peter Jones in *Building*, May 1935; *Architects’ Journal*, 9 July 1936; *Architect and Building News*, 26 June 1936 and *Architectural Review*, June 1939, and the reviews of Simpsons in *Architect and Building News*, 8 May 1936, 15 May 1936; *Architects’ Journal*, 21 May 1936; *Architectural Design and Construction*, June 1936; *Industrial Arts*, Summer 1936. Both stores were also reviewed in *Architectural Review*, June 1936.

<sup>19</sup> Although the list was admittedly compiled by C. H. Reilly, one of Peter Jones’ architects. *Architects’ Journal*, 14 January 1937, 102.



thirty-six public figures.<sup>20</sup> [Figures 7.2 and 7.3] It is a further testament to the buildings’ immediate high reputation in the architectural world that many manufacturers of building components and contractors advertised their goods and services in the prestigious *Architectural Review* through depicting their commissions at Peter Jones and Simpsons during the months after their opening.<sup>21</sup>

The architecture of these shops also had a more popular appeal, particularly important for John Lewis given its partnership structure, in which each member of staff was a member. John Spedan Lewis, the chairman, defended the proposed design of Peter Jones in an extensive article in the staff magazine.<sup>22</sup> The architecture also needed to appeal to shoppers. After it was unveiled, *Store* magazine reported that whilst ‘the external design of this building is without precedent in this country’ nonetheless, ‘people “accept” the design of this building in the same way as they do those of an automobile or an ocean liner.’<sup>23</sup> In a similar vein, *Building* considered that the new Peter Jones had ‘passed the critical test of acceptance by business men as a building which must make its appeal to the public, has delighted that very public by its elegant and, indeed, scholarly façade ... here is a contemporary expression which adequately fulfils all requirements, both aesthetic and practical.’<sup>24</sup>

Simpsons and Peter Jones were very much identified as architectural leaders in their field: they were prestige projects, feted in the architectural press in a manner unprecedented for shops. However, a survey of new shops published in the professional periodical press during the 1930s reveals that these two stores were part of a broader trend. Modernism, loosely defined, was the most significant idiom for retail architecture during the 1930s. Leading figures in the English Modern movement were designing for retail, and the style was chosen by the more important store owners when they commissioned buildings. [Figures 6.2, 6.3 and 6.4] These Modern shops were scattered liberally throughout the West End. For example, in Oxford Street alone the more notable examples included the rear block of John Lewis by Slater, Moberly and Uren with F. Singer of 1937-9, D. H.

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<sup>20</sup> *Architects’ Journal*, 25 May 1939

<sup>21</sup> For instance, Simpsons was used in the *Architectural Review* to advertise internal and external glass, June 1936, p.xxxix; ‘Cleora’ external neon tube lighting, June 1936 p.liii; bricks, July 1936, p.xlix; ‘Glas-crete’ windows, July 1936 p.lxxxix; ‘Vitrolite’ glass partitions September 1936, p.xlix; Copper sheathing, November 1936, p.xxvi. Peter Jones was featured in advertisements for lifts, June 1936, p.lxxv; sun-blinds and canopy facings, September 1936, p.xxxv; hollow tile floors, December 1936 and steel windows, November 1936, p.vii.

<sup>22</sup> *Gazette of the John Lewis Partnership*, 13 April 1935, 230.

<sup>23</sup> *Store*, October 1936, 4.

<sup>24</sup> *Building*, June 1937, 223.



Evans by Louis Blanc of 1937 and His Master’s Voice by Joseph Emberton of 1938-9. In addition there were many striking Modern shopfronts and renovations of older buildings. It is argued here that this association between Modern architecture and the West End shop was no coincidence: the Modern style expressed something particular about fashionable consumption cultures, and so retailers encouraged a particular kind of Modern architecture to proliferate in prominent streets in the centre of London.

### ‘THE STORE OF TOMORROW’: MODERNITY, NOVELTY AND MODERNISM.

On its most simplistic level, Modernism was valuable to West End retailers as it enabled them to mark themselves out as modern businesses that sold up-to-the-minute commodities. Chapter 6 outlined how the ‘newness’ of the Modern shop within the West End Street accentuated modernity, and aligned the structures with the intrinsically fleeting metropolitan shopping cultures of the place. Whilst modernity and novelty could not be straightforwardly read off a surface styled with a Modernist visual vocabulary, it is certainly the case that the architecture of Modern shops such as Simpsons and Peter Jones was highly, and self-consciously, innovative, not just in terms of fashionability of style, but also in structure and technology. This innovative quality was obviously highly attractive to retailers, who were endlessly seeking to portray themselves as ‘the newest’, ‘the most advanced’ and ‘the best’.

The relationship between Modernism and modernity has been the subject of much complex and inconclusive debate for historians and theorists of many disciplines.<sup>25</sup> It has also frequently been the pivot for the discussion of the social, cultural and, particularly, the gendered nature of architecture and design.<sup>26</sup> Wolff’s comment on the terms is useful: ‘modernism is [not] straightforwardly the art of modernity. Modernism is a particular set of practices and ideologies of representation; modernity is a specific historical experience. Modernism dates from the late nineteenth century; modernity is variously placed at the same date, identified as a sixteenth-century phenomenon, or located somewhere between

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<sup>25</sup> A complete list would obviously be inappropriate for inclusion here, but the following examples have been useful reference points for this thesis in examining this relationship between Modernism and modernity: Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity*; Conekin et al., *Moments of Modernity*; Donald, *Imagining the Modern City*; John Gold, *The Experience of Modernism*, London: Spon, 1997; Gronberg, *Designs on Modernity*; Hilde Heynen, *Architecture and Modernity: A Critique*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT, 1999; James, *Erich Mendelsohn*; Nava and O’Shea, *Modern Times*; Ward, *Weimar Surfaces*; Wigley, *White Walls, Designer Dresses*; Wolff, *Feminine Sentences*.

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, Leslie and Reimer, ‘Gender, Modern Design and Home Consumption’.



the two.<sup>27</sup> Architectural Modernism was a response to an essentially urban modern culture, of which modern consumer culture was an essential part. The relationship between Modernism and modernity within retail architecture was further complicated by the ambiguous role of novelty, ephemerality and obsolescence within Modernist theory.

It has been common practice to interpret retail architecture across the span of the last three centuries as an expression of modernity suited to the particular prevailing historical conditions. This equation has been made in a relatively straightforward and superficial manner: identifying modernity in the novelty of architectural style and the experimentality of construction techniques and materials, suggesting that both have essentially mirrored and advertised the fashionability of the store. In particular, historians have seen part of the distinctiveness of the department store lying in the heightened consciousness of the publicity value of using new kinds of architecture.<sup>28</sup>

However, a simple association between retail and architectural modernity cannot be made. Betsky describes the complexity of the revolutionary effect of the nineteenth-century department store, in its affront to the established, masculine, architectural order:

an open grid of glass and steel that ... dissolved the certainties of stone monuments and invited women back into the city to shop in a version of the rational environments in which men worked and made decisions. The great department stores with their skylights, elevators, garish displays of goods, and confusing spaces, offered an interior world blown up into a collage of goods that had little use for the orders of architecture ... They broke the rules of a proper architectural space, with its clear axis and hierarchy of functions, in favour of a delight in the infinite possibility of a tapestry of interpenetrating spaces that had more to do with the arrangement of the domestic interior than with the rules of public architecture.<sup>29</sup>

Furthermore, James has shown that the department store did not always deliberately construct an image of novelty and modernity through its architecture. She has suggested that Messel's German department store of the early the twentieth century, 'neutralised the impermanence of fashion by establishing a "timeless architecture" securely tied to the country's medieval cultural and commercial traditions', explaining how the association of art nouveau with ephemeral fashion limited the popularity of the architectural style for the

<sup>27</sup> Wolff, Janet, *Feminine Sentences*, 57.

<sup>28</sup> See for example Crossick and Jaumain, *Cathedrals of Consumption*; Siry, *Carson Pirie Scott*.

<sup>29</sup> Betsky, *Building Sex*, 146.



German retail sector at this time.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, Chapter 6 has outlined how in the 1930s West End, despite a clear preference for the Modern, other styles were used for shops. However, unlike James’s study, this thesis does not conclude that these shops wished to disassociate their businesses from the modernity of consumption cultures or from the fleeting fashionability of goods sold, suggesting rather that the relationship between retail and architectural modernity was quite complex and fluid.

Structural, material and technical novelties within architecture were certainly commonly read as welcome indicators of modernity in the 1930s. Rieger, for example, argues that at this time popular conceptions of technological advancements as ‘modern wonders’ suggested a period that believed in its unprecedented modernity.<sup>31</sup> The features of 1930s shops that marked them out as Modern were frequently also the sites of architectural experimentation, so that technical innovation became an important part of the Modern aesthetic. Both Simpsons and Peter Jones were overtly experimental in several respects.

At Simpsons, developments in steel technology allowed an unsupported span of sixty feet across the entrance frontage, reputedly the greatest in London at that time. The innovative concave display window, central to the architectural composition, used a newly patented process. There were teething problems with such a new design: the window broke on the day after opening, and it proved a very difficult task to find a company willing to insure it.<sup>32</sup> As discussed in Part III, costly experimental work was also carried out in the pursuit of suitably show-stopping neon and floodlighting for the store’s façade.

[Figure 7.4] Peter Jones’ façade constituted a very early use of the glazed curtain wall technique that was to become extremely popular in the post-war years, one of the signatures of the Modern commercial building.<sup>33</sup> In 1937, eminent Modern architect Walter Gropius predicted that this kind of walling would be taken up by ‘the store of tomorrow’, an image that was clearly attractive to a forward-looking retail firm:

To my mind, the most logical development for the store is cantilevered construction, because this obviates the need for piers, beams, and supporting walls, and reduces the number of internal pillars to a minimum. With this type of building, the external wall is nothing but a screen, and openings for

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<sup>30</sup> James ‘From Messel to Mendelsohn’, 256, 260.

<sup>31</sup> Bernhard Rieger, ‘“Modern Wonders”: Technological Innovation and Public Ambivalence in Britain and Germany, 1890s to 1933’, *History Workshop Journal*, No. 55, Spring 2003, 152 - 176.

<sup>32</sup> See the series of correspondence on the matter, May 1936, Simpsons Archive.

<sup>33</sup> Emberton’s Universal House at Southwark Bridge also used this method in 1933. Ind, *Emberton*, plates 57, 58.



the admission of daylight and fresh air can be made without restriction, because the windows can be arranged horizontally instead of vertically.<sup>34</sup>

[Figure 7.5] In 1932 a prototype section was built, subsequently retained in the completed building.<sup>35</sup> Experimentality was inscribed on the store’s surface in several ways. In June 1934 the Peter Jones Ltd Subcommittee for Design weighed up the benefits of exploiting the latest technical advances and using glass as a facing material, concluding that such risks were a necessary part of being ‘pioneering’.<sup>36</sup> The atmosphere of ‘risk taking’ infused the project: John Spedan Lewis told the partners: ‘If you consult experts in aesthetics, some will assure you that the design will be a tremendous success. Others will assure you of the contrary. ... You have really got to take a chance and we decided that on the whole we would take it.’<sup>37</sup>

The way Simpsons and Peter Jones exploited the latest glass technologies, outlined above, provides a useful example of how technological innovations such as this became emblematic elements of the Modern within this kind of architecture. The use of glass was not only advanced, it defined the façades of both stores: Peter Jones was described in the commemorative specification brochure as ‘one enormous metal window’.<sup>38</sup> Likewise, the horizontal bands of glazing on Simpsons’ façade were the basis of the design. This reflected a broader trend: in *Retailing and the Public* Neal wrote of modern store windows, ‘when taken in conjunction with the design as a whole they very often, by reason of their measurements and in the relation of their plate-glass expanse to structural frontage, determine the entire scale and proportion of the elevation.’<sup>39</sup>

Many historians have explored the meaning of the centrality of this material for Modernism. For example Jones writes:

Glass is a key element in the Modern Movement. Along with steel and concrete, it is the embodiment and instrument of the new architecture and modernity. Although this highly fetishised material had a range of meaning within the Modernist discourse, there was an area of consensus:

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<sup>34</sup> Walter Gropius, ‘The Store of Tomorrow’, *Store*, April 1937, 119-200.

<sup>35</sup> ‘As the design for the elevation was entirely new, a small portion was erected in Cadogan Gardens before the main building was commenced. This portion was ... experimental, and led to considerable improvements prior to the ... construction of the first main section of the building.’ Brochure: ‘A Review of the New Shop for Peter Jones’, c.1936, John Lewis Partnership Archive.

<sup>36</sup> Minutes of the Peter Jones Ltd Subcommittee for Design, 7 June 1934. John Lewis Partnership Archive.

<sup>37</sup> *Gazette of the John Lewis Partnership*, 13 April, 1935 231.

<sup>38</sup> *A Review of the New Shop for Peter Jones*, c.1936, John Lewis Partnership Archives.

<sup>39</sup> Lawrence E. Neal, *Retailing and the Public*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1932, 72-3.



‘SOMETHING OF A REVOLUTION HAD TAKEN PLACE IN ENGLISH ARCHITECTURE’

glass was taken to be a signifier and harbinger of a new collective life either under a reformed capitalism or socialist state.<sup>40</sup>

His reading of glass as a politicised material is closely related to a foregrounding of the theme of ‘surveillance’ in this and other accounts of inter-war Modernism: ‘The ubiquity of glass in Modernist Architecture - in windows, curtain walls, skylights and glazed stairwells - coupled with open-plan interiors and minimal, pellucid furnishings, slender steel-tubed chairs and glass-topped tables, such ‘panoptical elements’ created spaces with high levels of visibility crucial for the efficacy of panopticism.’<sup>41</sup> It is easy to see how these arguments could be developed to reveal glass’s additional appropriateness for the visibility of shopping cultures. Indeed Ward interprets the central position of glass in a different way from Jones, which allows for a closeness with consumer cultures,

As the prime facilitator of the new streamlining of design, as the man-made version of pure crystal, and as the medium par excellence of clean, clear surface, glass undeniably brought about the most dazzling transformation to date of architectural apperception. Modernity’s combined desire for hygienic openness, social utopianism, and spaces to show off the unadulterated spectacle of commodity fetishism found its answer in the architecture of transparency.<sup>42</sup>

It seems likely that the novel elements of Modern retail architecture were being harnessed in rather complex ways by the West End’s retailers.

‘HOW DANGEROUS IT IS TO ADOPT A POSE IN ARCHITECTURE’

The enthusiasm with which the architects of Simpsons and Peter Jones embraced ‘newness’ of style, structure and technology, and the positive professional reception of the stores, belied the fact that ‘novelty’ was a highly contentious commodity within Modern architectural theory and professional debates. It was the infusion of the fleeting fashionable concerns of metropolitan shopping cultures into the external architecture of stores that was identified as a both crucial and problematic within architectural discourse. On one hand this infusion allowed a closeness with the consumption practices housed by the building, on the other it raised the worrying association between Modern architecture and fleeting

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<sup>40</sup> Peter Jones, ‘Building the Empire of the Gaze: The Modern Movement and the Surveillance Society,’ *Architectural Theory Review*, Vol. 4, No. 2, November 1999, 6.

<sup>41</sup> Jones, ‘Building the Empire of the Gaze’, 8. This theme is also addressed in Colomina, *Sexuality and Space*.

<sup>42</sup> Ward, *Weimar Surfaces*, 62-3.



and superficial style. Modernism was concerned to present itself as simultaneously in alignment with modern life, and concerned with higher aims than stylistic fashionability, and these dual aims were brought into unavoidable conflict within the Modern shops of the West End. This chapter explores this apparent contradiction, looking at ways that it could be resolved.

A dialogue between two retail architects set up this central tension. On one side of the camp, F. E. Bennett stressed how the novelty of retail architecture communicated a modernity which was in tune with the fast-pace of modern life:

it seems that some of these ‘modern’ shops serve the very good purpose of absorbing an overflow of architectural frivolity, but at the same time, to gain an effect of frivolity a design may have to be taken very seriously. The joy of the shop is its ephemeral nature; it flashes for a short space, is a thing of fashion which runs well in the van of the most up-to-date ideas of design, and then fades away behind the shadow of a new fashion. In the light of the ponderous tradition of architectural precedent the fashionable shopfront may be a poor thing, but by its little flash of boldness, of bolshevik reaction from the grand architectural manner, it may serve to tickle the intellectual palate and so justify itself.<sup>43</sup>

On the other hand, Charles Reilly warned,

The shop of the Parfums d’Orsay, Paris, which one used to admire a few years ago, already looks too full blown and as if today the scent sold there would be a little too powerful ... which shows how dangerous it is to adopt a pose in architecture unless it is for a definitely limited time, such as in an exhibition building shortly to be demolished.<sup>44</sup>

There was a definite sense that the ephemeral ‘little flash of boldness’ was something to be kept carefully in check. John Spedan Lewis commented, ‘Most of us do not love novelty for its own sake. I certainly do not.’<sup>45</sup> The right note had apparently been struck as, according to *Store*, ‘there is neither freakishness nor stuntism about it, nor is there anything merely quaint or exotic likely to cause its exclusive clientele to ask, “What’s it all about?”’

<sup>46</sup>

Gronberg describes the moralising tone in a parallel 1920s Parisian debate about the

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<sup>43</sup> F. E. Bennett A.R.I.B.A. ‘The Shop’, *The Builder*, 1 February 1929, 240.

<sup>44</sup> C. H. Reilly, ‘Shopfronts’, *Architectural Review*, July 1935, 25.

<sup>45</sup> *Gazette of the John Lewis Partnership*, 13 April 1935 p.231.

<sup>46</sup> *Store*, October 1936, 4.



temporality of exhibition architecture, with a particular focus on the ‘shop’ exhibits.<sup>47</sup> However, she sets up an opposition between serious Modern architecture and ephemeral ‘feminine’ exhibition buildings that does not translate easily to a discussion of the Modern shop, or indeed to the flowering of Modernist exhibition design. A very close association between ephemerality, experiment and Modernism was actually apparent in the genre of the exhibition stand and building. Le Corbusier’s stand for *L’Esprit Nouveau* at the 1925 Exposition des Arts Décoratifs in Paris, which soon became an icon for international Modernism, was positioned in this manner. On the British scene Oliver Hill, Serge Chermayeff, Wells Coates, Joseph Emberton, Maxwell Fry, Raymond McGrath and the firm of Connell, Ward and Lucas, were amongst the leading Modern practices who carried out significant work in the field of Modern exhibition structures.<sup>48</sup>

There was something about the ephemerality of shops and exhibitions that appealed to Modern architects, beyond representing valuable commissions. Furthermore, these structures provided the projects where Modernism’s forms, materials and theories could incubate. For instance, an article on recent Parisian shopfronts in the *Architect and Building News* of 1931 suggested that new Corbusian architecture had stripped French architecture of its certainties, and that the scale, and the lack of specific and rigid architectural precedent for little perfumiers and department stores alike meant that they were easier for architects to address in the new building style than more formal and historic building types.<sup>49</sup>

In unravelling the relationship between Modernism and the shop, it is apparent that the themes of ephemerality and fashion were central. In order to establish whether the professional accolades accorded to Simpsons and Peter Jones reflected the superlative quality of these buildings as architecture, or whether there was an associated acceptance of the retail building as a suitable conduit for Modernism, the nature of the relationship between retail and architectural Modernism must be examined more closely.

Architectural commentators had long denigrated retail architecture, dismissing it as somewhat vulgar and popular, tainted by the feminised middle-class consumer culture that it served. Rappaport’s discussion of the debates over the rebuilding of Regent Street

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<sup>47</sup> Gronberg, *Designs on Modernity*, 7, 44.

<sup>48</sup> The history and significance of the design of exhibition stands is discussed in Dean, *The Thirties*, 102-111.

<sup>49</sup> *Architect and Building News*, 27 March 1931, 445-8



reveals the prevalence of this attitude amongst traditional, establishment architects of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>50</sup> The same stance can be detected in the Modernist theory underpinning 1930s Modern architectural practice. Adolf Loos's turn-of-the-century Modernist rhetoric about the degradation of designed objects by the abuse of decoration, which set up an opposition between femininity and Modernism, had been kept alive in inter-war Modernist theory particularly through the writings of Le Corbusier.<sup>51</sup> Dean describes the impact on the young British architectural scene of Le Corbusier's *Vers une Architecture*, translated into English in 1927: 'Le Corbusier's book, with its sweep, its certainty and its incantatory fervour, was just what the young progressives had been waiting for.'<sup>52</sup> This discourse reveals a deeply ambivalent attitude towards retail architecture and consumption in general, yet to be properly examined by historians, despite extensive work on related attitudes to gender.

In a well-known passage from *Decorative Art of Today* of 1925, Le Corbusier wrote:

Today decorative objects flood the shelves of the department stores; they sell cheaply to shop-girls ... the healthy gaiety of the shop-girl in her flower-patterned cretonne dress, becomes rank corruption when surrounded by Renaissance stoves, Turkish smoking tables, Japanese umbrellas, chamber pots and bidets from Lunéville or Rouen, Bichara perfumes, bordello lamp-shades, pumpkin cushions, divans spread with gold and silver lamé, black velvets flecked like the Grand Turk, rugs with baskets of flowers and kissing doves, linoleum printed with Louis XVI ribbons.<sup>53</sup>

Whilst a clearly gendered diatribe, the passage also positioned the department store environment as the antithesis of Modernism, and the location of the crimes of decoration. Furthermore, one of its key inhabitants, the shop-girl, was cast at once as the victim and purveyor of this degenerate consumer culture. This kind of rhetoric presented architects of retail with a problem. To engage with the function of the building - the business of selling, commodities, fashion and the consumer – would taint the architecture, although such an engagement with function was absolutely necessary for a truly Modern building.

This chapter argues that the problem was not so much that retail architecture was seen as

<sup>50</sup> Rappaport, 'Art, Commerce, or Empire?'.  


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<sup>51</sup> See for example Le Corbusier, *Essential Le Corbusier: L'Esprit Nouveau Articles*, Oxford: Architectural Press, 1998; Adolf Loos, *Ornament and Crime: Selected Essays*, Adolf Opel (ed.) and Michael Mitchell (trans.), Riverside: Ariadne Press, 1998.

<sup>52</sup> Dean, *The Thirties*, 14.

<sup>53</sup> Le Corbusier, *Decorative Art of Today*, 1925, reproduced in *Essential Le Corbusier: L'Esprit Nouveau Articles*, Oxford: Architectural Press, 1998, 89-90.



essentially feminine, as Gronberg has suggested in her study of Parisian Boutiques, but that it was closely associated with fashion, surface and the commodity. The treatment of the surfaces of buildings had long been a nexus for architectural debates, and this was an especially significant issue for inter-war Modernism. It was in the nature of urban retail architecture to prioritise the surface over structure or form. This was partly a consequence of the sites available, where the façade was the only externally visible part of the building, and partly because rebuilding often took the form of refacing, as described earlier in Chapter 6. It was also because of the heightened function of the façade as advertising, explored later in this chapter. [Figure 6.4] *The Builder* highlighted how the accentuation of the surface was linked to a particular relationship with the street, ‘The new H.M.V. building is an object lesson in street-front design; it concentrates interest within the normal range of vision from the pavement - the shopfront treatment is very well done, and the essential publicity is welded into the substance of the design in an attractively emphatic manner.’<sup>54</sup>

The debate about the surface was injected with a particular intensity within Modernist discourse.<sup>55</sup> Within this thinking, the relative prominence of the store façade became evidence of a lack of architectural integrity, a fundamental problem that compounded the existing issue of the incoherently fractured façade described in Chapter 6. The treatment of store façades was also identified as key evidence of an association with ephemeral and feminine fashion. Modernism was harshly moralising when it came to matters of style. Dean describes how the debate over what constituted proper Modern architecture centred on the perceived corruption of Modernism into a style applied to the surface, ‘the modernists hated seeing their visual vocabulary stolen. The trouble was that it was so attractive.’<sup>56</sup> Mark Wigley has usefully described how the Modern school repeatedly claimed to have divested the building of its old clothing, merely covering its structure in a ‘skin’ of white paint.<sup>57</sup> Wigley also points to Modernism’s state of denial about the intrinsic contradictions within this standpoint, white-wall Modernism being as surface-focussed as other kinds of building. [Figure 7.6] Wigley’s argument is difficult to transpose directly onto the Modern shops of the West End, none of which were of the ‘white wall’ variety.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> *Building*, February 1938 (1), 288.

<sup>55</sup> Discussed in Ward, *Weimar Surfaces* and Wigley, *White Walls, Designer Dresses*.

<sup>56</sup> Dean, *The Thirties*, 42.

<sup>57</sup> Wigley, *White Walls, Designer Dresses*.

<sup>58</sup> There was a suggestion that the close association with Modernism and new materials such as concrete and novel glass products was weakening towards the late 1930s, as MOMA noted: ‘The mere association of certain materials with traditional architecture should no longer be a bar to their use in modern architecture when they are technically suitable.’



Wigley's observations were moreover frequently voiced by contemporary critics, for example in Osbert Lancaster's enormously popular parodies of English architecture such as *Homes Sweet Homes*, which humorously exposed the Modern Movement as one amongst many styles.<sup>59</sup> Despite, or perhaps because, of this deep-seated internal contradiction, the main consequence of the Modernist rhetoric was that the supposed architectural crimes of 'façadism' and the use of architecture as an exterior 'style' were pursued with a particular ferocity.

This debate had two major implications for the relationship with retail architecture. Firstly, whatever the truth of the matter, if Modern architects passionately *believed* that Modern 'style' was not a 'fashion' which would be superseded as other styles had been, this posed problems for its commissioning by store owners, who had traditionally looked to architecture to provide the store with a veneer of 'novelty'. Secondly, the intrinsically 'façadist' nature of store architecture might be expected to be problematic. Yet it was clear that the handling of the façades at Simpsons and Peter Jones was a crucial part of their Modern identities: the smooth stone façade of Simpsons with its confident horizontal glazing bands, dramatic floodlighting and neon signage; and the curtain-glazed skin of Peter Jones. Indeed, it can be said that the architectural reputation of Simpsons in particular was due to the aesthetics of its façade, not its structure or materials.

In fact, the position on the subject of style and surface was far from clear-cut. [Figure 7.7] Betjeman's polemic *Ghastly Good Taste* of 1933 is enlightening here, pointing to a complex relationship between the commercial and 'architecture-as-style'. He constructed a 'family tree' of buildings in good and bad taste. The commercial was clearly a problem: in the line of 'bad taste' were Regent Street and the 'pseudo-modern factories with Egyptian motives', 'all cheap cushions and fabrics and handbags and ashtrays and teacups, which depend on strident colours slashed together for their effect' and 'most new cinemas'. Collectively such buildings were shown to lead to 'the deep pit of speculative building' usually characterised by a superficial posturing of style rather than an honest and

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*Modern Architecture in England*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1937, 35. This point is also raised by Alan Powers, 'What ... tends to be omitted from histories of the period is the change which was coming over English modernism by the end of the decade. The pure white house seldom occurred, the natural materials like stone, boarding and wooden window frames reappeared. This was surely the equivalent of the reactionary and romantic tendency in English painting, poetry and, above all, ballet which dominated the war years.' Powers, *Look Stranger at this Island Now*, 13-14. F. R. Yerbury, key photographer of Modern Architecture for architectural journals, expressed the belief that Portland stone was eminently appropriate for Modern architecture in London. Elwall, *Photography Takes Command*, 58

<sup>59</sup> Osbert Lancaster, *Homes Sweet Homes* London: John Murray, 1939, Discussed in David Watkin, 'Architectural Writing in the Thirties', in Stamp, Gavin (ed.), *AD Profile 24: Britain in the Thirties*, London: Architectural Design, 1979, 89.



appropriate relationship with function.<sup>60</sup> Betjeman did not, however, single out the Modern shops of the 1930s for criticism. On the contrary, Cresta shops in London were amongst the 'good' designs, which included Emberton's Yacht Club in Burnham-on-Crouch, and Etchells' building for Crawfords

On the other hand, Matthews notes that MOMA's conception of the Modern was largely based on style.<sup>61</sup> Similarly, Colomina lays the charge at MOMA curators Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson that at the 'International Exhibition of Modern Architecture' exhibition of 1932, Modern architects' work 'was understood only in aesthetic terms and reduced to a "style" devoid of its social, ethical, and political content.'<sup>62</sup> However, regarding the museum's 'Modern Architecture in England' exhibition of 1937, it is possibly closer to the truth that the curators believed *English* architecture was particularly characterised by a stylistic rather than a structural or spatial Modernism. The catalogue commented, 'The sense of form as expressed in the exterior composition of English modern architecture is often of a far higher quality than the plans would lead one to expect.'<sup>63</sup> Similarly, a Dutch review of Simpsons drew comparisons with a Hilversum hotel, 'Simpson's shop has neither the constructional principles not the elegance and playfulness that characterise Duiker's hotel - but for England this is not the point. It is more important to recognise this building as a symptom of "l'Esprit Nouveau".'<sup>64</sup> The emphasis on the façade did not apparently weaken Simpsons' brand of Modernism or render it superficial. It enabled the building to operate in a Modern, urban manner. But crucially, this façade was architecturally acceptable *because* of its Modern pedigree and 'honesty', as described here by the *Architect and Building News*, 'the Portland Stone facing... is applied in a way which leaves no doubt as to its purpose; it is merely a veneer, and suggests no association with solid walling.'<sup>65</sup>

The façade-centred nature of retail architecture also raised the whole issue of spectacle, which is explored in more depth in Part III. Simpsons' façade expressed the store's identity, loaded with symbolism about the modernity of the goods and lifestyle that could

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<sup>60</sup> John Betjeman, *Ghastly Good Taste: or a Depressing Story of the Rise and Fall of English Architecture*, London: Anthony Blond, 1970 (first pub. 1933), 108-9.

<sup>61</sup> Matthews, 'The Promotion of Modern Architecture', 43-59.

<sup>62</sup> Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity*, 202.

<sup>63</sup> *Modern Architecture in England*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1937, 37. It has been noted however, that the exhibition reflected MOMA's own stylistic bias Matthews, 'The Promotion of Modern Architecture'.

<sup>64</sup> *Den Acht en Opbouw*, 1937, 148-50 quoted in Ind, Rosemary, *Emberton*, London and Berkeley: Scolar Press, 1983, 33.

<sup>65</sup> *Architect and Building News*, 8 May 1936, 155. The *Architectural Review* also makes this point. *Architectural Review*, June 1936, 270.



be bought inside. However, novelty and spectacle in the street scene were surprisingly most problematic for traditionalists for whom it represented a break with accepted architectural systems, accusing store owners of treating Modernism as a ‘good stunt to bring people into the store.’<sup>66</sup>

in recent years ... a number of shops have tried to take to themselves the type of architectural splendour and magnificence which should have been preserved for important public buildings. In the façade of Selfridges, for instance, the colossal Classic Order, comparable to that which adorns the British Museum, while it is undoubtedly beautiful in itself, seems to indicate a lack of sense of proportion and a failure to appreciate civic values.<sup>67</sup>

A common response from architects of both camps was to ‘contain’ the spectacular Modern shopfront, particularly the window, preventing consumer cultures from contaminating the bulk of the ‘architecture’. The convention of the dislocated shopfront was used to establish an architectural separation of window and rest of the elevation, for example ‘Isobel’ in Regent Street was reviewed by *The Builder*, ‘A plain surface of deep black marble spreads itself around the windows and isolates the show space from the stonework of the façade above.’<sup>68</sup> Similarly, for Charles Reilly the newly permitted canopies above display windows were a welcome architectural barrier between the glazed ground floor and the rest of the building. He also suggested that the architect should be given a retaining fee ‘to see that architecture in its most abstract form re-enters the window in the display of goods and remains there.’<sup>69</sup> Retailers were clearly not to be trusted.

Architectural anti-retailer rhetoric was certainly to be found within the West End and was an established view of British elite cultural circles.<sup>70</sup> Rappaport has described how during the early twentieth-century retailers were not deemed capable of making appropriate decisions about the future of Regent Street’s architecture.<sup>71</sup> In 1929 to 1930 a similar discussion took place on the pages of the *Architectural Review* Harrods’ recent advertising campaign, publishing the letters of George Bernhard Shaw, Arnold Bennett and H. G. Wells declining a request to write advertising copy, provoked a debate about the value

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<sup>66</sup> A view expressed by architect Sir Lawrence Weaver in *Architectural Review*, May 1930, 227. See also A Trystan Edwards, *The Architecture of Shops*, London: Chapman and Hall, 1933, 26-7.

<sup>67</sup> A Trystan Edwards, *The Architecture of Shops*, London: Chapman and Hall, 1933, 13.

<sup>68</sup> F. E. Bennett A.R.I.B.A. ‘The Shop’, *The Builder* 1 February 1929, 241.

<sup>69</sup> C. H. Reilly, ‘Shopfronts’, *Architectural Review*, July 1935, 26.

<sup>70</sup> Suga acknowledges the contentious nature of commercial art, tracing a lineage for this tension back to discussions surrounding the early years of the V&A Museum. Yasuko Suga, ‘“Purgatory of taste” of Projector of Industrial Britain? The British Institute of Industrial Art,’ *Journal of Design History*, vol. 16 no. 2 1993, 167-185.

<sup>71</sup> Rappaport, ‘Art, Commerce, or Empire?’.



placed on art, architecture, and general good design by store owners. The *Architectural Review* took exception to the store’s suggestion that they employed the best professionals, painting a picture of a philistine British retail system, which shirked the responsibility of improving public taste, and displayed poor business sense in this respect.<sup>72</sup> John Gloag made the stinging comment, ‘The selling of goods has become so tremendously more important than the goods themselves.’<sup>73</sup> Even Charles Reilly, working at the time on the design for Peter Jones, wrote in the *Architectural Review*: ‘A casual glance down Oxford Street, Bond Street, the Western Road, Brighton, or any important provincial thoroughfare lined with shops, is enough to make one wonder whether in this England of ours shops and shopfronts are not altogether outside the pale of the arts.’<sup>74</sup>

Retailers were accused of placing a low priority on architecture. For example, the Westwoods lamented that ‘qualified architects still only design a small proportion of the shops erected’.<sup>75</sup> In a similar vein, *Commercial Art* identified a lack of architectural awareness on the part of the British retailer,

Too often the shopkeeper appears willing to buy his shopfront design ready-made, from a selection of stock patterns. He has not the pride, or the sense of discrimination, which makes his French rival delight in an original design which he permits the architect, the decorator, and the builder, to sign as an artist signs a picture ... Famous as a nation of shopkeepers, we have not fully realised that a well-designed shopfront is something necessary to good business, and something, too, which can only be achieved by employing talent of a really high order.<sup>76</sup>

In this architectural uneasiness about retail, anxieties can be identified concerning class, alongside those about gender, fashion and surface. This was clearly discernible when *Art and Industry* reported the views of a spurious ‘man in the street’ on the new Simpsons, ‘The general air of formality about the place didn’t make me feel quite at ease; if I suffered from an inferiority complex, I should have been scared stiff of the place. I think it’s due mainly to the elaborate and ultra-modern display, which is quite different from any other shop or store I know of.’<sup>77</sup> Daunton and Rieger warn, ‘the cultural forms of modernism adopted by an artistic elite should not be confused with the ways in which different groups

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<sup>72</sup> The debate took place in an article by Harrods architect, Louis Blanc in *Architectural Review*, of June 1929, and continued in the response of a Swedish store director in defence of the value placed on art and design in his store in *Architectural Review*, Oct 1929, 199 - 202, and in an editorial comment in *Architectural Review*, May 1930, 223-5.

<sup>73</sup> *Architectural Review*, May 1930, 227.

<sup>74</sup> C. H. Reilly, ‘Shopfronts’, *Architectural Review*, July 1935, 25.

<sup>75</sup> Westwood, Bryan and Norman, *Smaller Retail Shops*, London: The Architectural Press, 1937, 12.

<sup>76</sup> *Commercial Art* October 1931, 147.

<sup>77</sup> *Art and Industry* July 1936, 23.



in society negotiated various meanings of modernity.’<sup>78</sup> However, the deliberate adoption of a Modernist style by a self-consciously modern retail industry was significant due to the requirements of retail buildings to attract a large number of customers. Thus a review of Peter Jones in the *Architectural Review* stated, ‘The study of fashion trends is *ipso facto* the study of mob psychology so the department store in consequence becomes a taste-barograph of the Man-in-the-Street.’<sup>79</sup> Nonetheless, it was no coincidence that stores like Peter Jones and Simpsons which had a comparatively exclusive reputation were able to carry off an impeccably Modernist style, whereas the more popular Woolworths stores adopted a more Hollywood-inflected moderne.

### ‘CANNOT ART AND COMMERCE BE INDISSOLUBLY UNITED ... ?’ THE RAPPROCHEMENT BETWEEN RETAIL AND ARCHITECTURE DURING THE 1930S

The apparent gap between the contemporary theoretic writing on retail architecture and the seemingly unproblematic use of the style by key 1930s shops, and subsequent embracing of the results by the architectural profession, is striking. The question arises of whether something had happened to retail architecture, and indeed to attitudes towards retail, during the 1930s. Part II has shown that retail was associated with Modern architecture, and involved the work of many of the most established and respected architects in the field, which goes some way to explaining the increased status of the building type.

In an article on ‘Modern shops’ in American *Vogue*, it was suggested that the relationship between retail and Modern architecture might be differently configured according to nationality - France was seen as leading the way: ‘Art as a commercial asset is a comparatively recent development in American business. ... It is curious that with all America’s vaunted supremacy in the field of business, this important asset should have been overlooked. France has made art the basis of her economic success.’<sup>80</sup>

This thesis suggests that on the British scene, the conceptual boundaries between commerce and the arts were also breaking down. This was reflected in the development

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<sup>78</sup> Dauntton and Rieger, *Meanings of Modernity*, 5.

<sup>79</sup> *Architectural Review*, June 1939, 293.

<sup>80</sup> ‘Modern Shops’, *Vogue* (New York), 18 January 1930, 73.



and high-profile activities of particular organisations. Suga identifies an ‘unprecedented endeavour made in inter-war Britain to increase awareness of the economic importance of visualisation and design’, through organisations such as the British Institute of Industrial Art, the Design and Industries Association, the Council for Art and Industry and journals such as *Commercial Art*.<sup>81</sup> It was also evidenced in the design strategies of companies such as London Underground,<sup>82</sup> the editorial concerns of the professional architectural press and the treatment of retail buildings by their owners.

As has been explored elsewhere in this thesis, during the 1930s, shopping cultures and the commercial in general were simply not the source of such social anxiety that they had apparently been in the Victorian and Edwardian periods. There was much evidence for a softening of the architectural profession towards these things. The extensive coverage of the broad spectrum of new retail buildings in architectural journals certainly suggests a more prominent status of retail design. It is also significant that a view of the new Regent Street was chosen as the emblem for the 1927 calendar published by *The Builder*.<sup>83</sup> It is additionally worth noting that a large proportion of the key architects and designers associated with Modern shops had their offices in the West End during the 1930s, creating a professional hub in the acknowledged centre of metropolitan consumption cultures.<sup>84</sup>

Stamp notes that the division within inter-war architectural circles between the ‘highly regarded “art architects” and the somewhat despised commercial practitioners’ blurred following the RIBA’s establishment of professional registration in 1931.<sup>85</sup> Many artists, designers and architects inhabited both worlds.<sup>86</sup> This was a trait noticeable in the key personnel at Simpsons. Former Bauhaus artist Moholy Nagy, Simpsons’ display manager, crossed boundaries between commercial practice and fine art with regularity in his career after emigrating to London.<sup>87</sup> Similarly, Ashley Havinden of Crawfords, responsible for graphics and advertising at Simpsons, was also recognised as an accomplished fine artist.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>81</sup> Suga, ‘“Purgatory of taste”’.

<sup>82</sup> Saler identifies those working in this field as ‘medieval modernists’ who ‘not only hoped to reintegrate art with life – they intended to integrate modern art with modern life.’ Saler, *The Avant-Garde in Inter-war England*, 19.

<sup>83</sup> *The Builder*, January 1927.

<sup>84</sup> Oliver Bernard was to be found at 93 Park Lane, Louis Blanc at 8a New Burlington Street, William Crabtree at 8 Adam Street, Portman Square, Joseph Emberton at 136 Regent Street, Frederick Etchells at 52 Davies Street, Ernő Goldfinger at 7 Bedford Square, Slater, Moberly and Uren at 46 Berners Street and P. J. Westwood and Sons at 14 Buckingham Street.

<sup>85</sup> Stamp, *Britain in the Thirties*, 14

<sup>86</sup> Dean describes the crossover between fine artists and advertising, and also the interior, furniture and rug design of architects in the period. Dean, *The Thirties*, 79.

<sup>87</sup> Profile of Moholy – Nagy, *Art and Industry*, March 1937.

<sup>88</sup> Havinden et al., *Advertising and the Artist*.



This meant that the store was an excellent example of all that the Design and Industries Association stood for, and the organisation arranged a visit as soon as the store was finished.<sup>89</sup> A new journal called *Commercial Art* had begun publication in 1922,<sup>90</sup> encouraging just such professional crossover. The initial editorial refuted charges that commerce debased art:

Cannot Art and Commerce be indissolubly united and by this means enhance the scope of human activity? In reality Art exists everywhere and even a number of highbrows concede that it has an occasional use in Commerce. Our contention is that its use in Commerce is constant, immense and indispensable ... To-day Commercial Art has fetters which it wants to shake off, the worker thinks, the trader has an idea, the artist creates, the fetters loosen and fall, and to-morrow Art and Commerce will join hands to personify the triumph of youth and progress.<sup>91</sup>

The contents of the journal reveal the increasing seriousness and professionalism with which aspects of retail design, particularly advertising, display and shopfront design, were treated within this field. Furthermore, the prevalence of such rallying cries decreased within the journal during the 1930s, suggesting that this relationship had become altogether less contentious as the decade wore on.

There is no doubt that as Saler and Suga suggest there was an identifiable commitment from sectors within the art world, industry and commerce to educating the public about Modern arts during this period. Saler discusses the pervasive belief that ‘art would spiritualize capitalism, humanising its more calculating aspects, and capitalism, the new “religion” of the modern world, would restore a social function to art, just as Christianity had guided art and artists in the middle ages.’<sup>92</sup> During the 1930s, West End store owners placed an extremely high premium on architecture, and indeed acted as key patrons of the Modern Movement. Stores such as Harrods collaborated with the Design and Industries Association by hosting ‘Good Design’ exhibitions of store merchandise.<sup>93</sup> Several stores, or chains of stores, invested in in-house architects or maintained a close relationship with a particular practice; for example the work of Westwood and Emberton for Austin Reed, Robert Lutyens for Marks and Spencer, Crabtree and Slater and Moberly for John Lewis

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<sup>89</sup> Letter from Joseph Emberton to Alexander Simpson, 15 May 1936, Simpsons Archive.

<sup>90</sup> The journal was soon renamed *Commercial Art and Industry*, before becoming *Art and Industry* in April 1936.

<sup>91</sup> *Commercial Art*, October 1922, 1.

<sup>92</sup> Saler, *The Avant-Garde in Inter-war England*, 9. It should be noted, however, that Curtis suggests that the education of the public and business about Modernism was not as successful, or radical, as it was on the continent. Curtis, *Modern Architecture since 1900*.

<sup>93</sup> *Store*, October 1936, 24.



and Fritz Landauer for Boots and the Kardomah cafes (with Misha Black).<sup>94</sup> The careful choice of architects and design teams at Simpsons and Peter Jones, outlined earlier in the chapter, confirms this impression that stores took their architecture seriously.

The question of patronage is important. An identifiable association between building type and architectural style appears to have existed, although not perhaps the building types that might be expected. Indeed Alan Powers notes Gloag’s assertion that the identification of Modern architecture with left-wing ideals and projects was not exclusive, as exemplified by Simpson and Peter Jones; this association was the corruption of subsequent discourse.<sup>95</sup> In MOMA’s exhibition whereas three of the seventy-seven exhibits were shops (the third being Emberton’s shop for Timothy White in Southsea, Hampshire), half of the exhibits were private houses or flats. MOMA explained this bias in terms of a concentration of patrons of Modernism within certain sectors: ‘Since English modern architecture has developed in a period of economic recovery, the types of building which the architects have been asked to provide have rarely been of advanced sociological interest. Middle-class houses and apartments, large stores, recreational structures, casinos, cinemas, zoos, schools and factories, rather than low-cost housing have been demanded.’<sup>96</sup> Stephen Bayley concurs, stressing that Modern architecture in Britain was driven by the private client. Modern architects were not usually spoilt for choice for commissions, and needed to take the work they were offered. However, it was also the case that local authority work, where the large public projects were situated, was still considered of significantly lower status than private practice.<sup>97</sup> This picture contrasts with Saler’s identification of organisations such as London Transport as the most important patrons of Modernism in Britain during the period.<sup>98</sup>

American *Vogue* went so far as to suggest that the department store was the champion of the Modern, as,

In using art as a commercial asset, it should be superfluous to say that in all cases it has been expressed in the modern idiom. Educators and critics have credited the department store with exerting a greater influence on public taste than fine art museums. In fact, since these shops were the

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<sup>94</sup> Emberton remained store architect for Simpson Piccadilly for decades after the store opened, and it is clear from the store minutes and correspondence that he was considered a key member of the team.

<sup>95</sup> Powers, ‘*Look Stranger at this Island Now*’, 14.

<sup>96</sup> *Modern Architecture in England*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1937, 31.

<sup>97</sup> Stephen Bayley, ‘Patrons of the Modern Movement’ in Stamp, Gavin (ed.), *AD Profile 24: Britain in the Thirties*, London: Architectural Design, 1979, 90.

<sup>98</sup> Saler, *The Avant-Garde in Inter-war England*.



first organisations to encourage the modern movement by holding international exhibitions of decorative arts and carrying merchandise representing the best European expression in the various decorative arts, they have been called the only American modern decorative arts museums worthy of the name. Now they extend their influence a step further by giving the modern movement a concrete expression in their architectural and decorative backgrounds.<sup>99</sup>

Alexander Simpson’s gathering of a community of avant-garde creative people around his shop project, described earlier in the chapter, could certainly be interpreted in this way and even John Spedan Lewis stated his intention to hold permanent exhibitions within Peter Jones for public edification.<sup>100</sup> Whilst a zeal to educate the public about Modern art and design might have motivated organisations like the DIA, and individuals such as Frank Pick of London Underground, West End retail, though flourishing, was not the gold mine that would enable store owners to act primarily as patrons of Modernism in commissioning such stores as Peter Jones and Simpsons. Neither were their owners this altruistic. To reduce their relationship with their Modern buildings to a desire to communicate modernity equally fails to encompass the complexity of architecture’s role.

As explored in Part III, the new stores managed to be architecturally spectacular, blurring boundaries between architecture, lighting, display and pageantry, but did so within a Modern palette. However, *Industrial Arts* recognised an inherent functionalism within the spectacular strategies:

In planning Simpson’s new shop in Piccadilly, Mr. Joseph Emberton was not attempting to produce something conspicuous. Nor was he solving the general problem of the modern shop. If he has achieved a shop with high publicity value for its goods and a building which emphasises in its features the logical development of modern selling practice, this is simply because he has been successful in finding the answer to his individual problem.<sup>101</sup>

Another significant factor in explaining the rapprochement between retail and Modernism was that within the breadth of British Modern architectural practice, there was space for a group of modern building types including stores, funfairs, exhibitions and cinemas, which came under the banner of ‘leisure architecture’ or ‘the architecture of pleasure’, to quote the phrase used in the *Architect and Building News* review of Emberton’s buildings at

<sup>99</sup> ‘Modern Shops’ in *Vogue* (New York), 18 January 1930, 73.

<sup>100</sup> *Gazette of the John Lewis Partnership*, 13 April 1935, 228.

<sup>101</sup> *Industrial Arts*, Summer 1936, 88.



Blackpool Pleasure Beach.<sup>102</sup> Emberton’s key work clearly belonged in this category. This was a kind of Modern architecture that prioritised display, styling and drama, indeed visual pleasure was central to their function. Even Modernism’s critics, such as A. Trystan Edwards, recognised the importance of this attribute:

The true art of salesmanship consists ... In the ability to make the act of shopping a pleasant act, and the pleasure should depend not only on the good quality and the artistic merit of the objects sold, but also upon the architectural setting of the objects inside the shop, the architectural setting of the shop in the street and the suitability of the street itself as an attractive resort for shoppers.<sup>103</sup>

The designs of the Modern shops exemplified the light-heartedness in British Modernist architecture of the 1930s identified by Powers, despite the heavy burden of the theories.<sup>104</sup>

#### ‘MORE EFFECTIVE ... THAN ANY AMOUNT OF PERSUASIVE ADVERTISING COPY’

This chapter suggests that the cultural closeness between retail architecture and Modernism in the 1930s West End can also be identified in the particularly effective symbolic potential of this new architecture, which could be easily exploited by store owners as a marketing strategy. The façades of the West End’s Modern shops advertised the modernity of the businesses, but they also spoke more specifically about the consumer cultures housed within the buildings. However, this quality also exacerbated Modernism’s anxieties over issues of style and surface outlined earlier.

A reading of architecture as symbolic and representational, revealing of cultural tropes including gender and gender relationships, has been increasingly prevalent within architectural history and theory. Notable here is work by Colomina, Ward and Wigley, who have argued that this characteristic was especially highly developed in the Modern architecture of the inter-war years.<sup>105</sup> However retail architecture had in fact long been interpreted in contemporary comment in terms of its symbolic nature, and had been harnessed by store owners to promote their stores in particular ways. In particular, the

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<sup>102</sup> *Architect and Building News*, 28 June 1935, 383-7.

<sup>103</sup> A Trystan Edwards, *The Architecture of Shops*, London: Chapman and Hall, 1933, 61.

<sup>104</sup> Powers, ‘*Look Stranger at this Island Now*’, 12

<sup>105</sup> Colomina, *Sexuality and Space*; Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity*; Ward, *Weimar Surfaces*; Wigley, *White Walls, Designer Dresses*.



owners of the first department stores made a direct link between the splendour of their buildings and the promotion of the luxurious nature of their goods, as famously described by Zola. His store owner, Mouret, argued the case for a new building project, ‘An advertisement! An advertisement! This one will be in stone, and it’ll outlast us all. Can’t you see that it would increase our business tenfold!’<sup>106</sup>

Nonetheless, over the decades, the messages conveyed about store identities would shift, and the communicative capacity of retail architecture was honed, so that by the 1930s it had become a sophisticated mechanism for communicating with consumers. James has described how in the inter-war years in Germany, Mendelsohn, the key inspiration for many Modern British stores, excelled at creating Modern attention-grabbing retail architecture.<sup>107</sup> Contemporary sources suggest similar developments within the West End, and also point to a popular reading of retail architecture in this way. For example, *Commercial Art* featured a new shopfront in Conduit Street for Madame Quartier hairdressers, ‘One glance at the Quartier shopfront is almost sufficient to tell the class of business carried on ... The small windows and pilaster showcase suggest feminine daintiness and an air of luxury.’<sup>108</sup>

One part of the explanation for this shift, within the West End at least, is the change in who is controlling the symbolic element of retail architecture. Rappaport’s study of the West End earlier in the twentieth century shows how the language of Regent Street’s new architecture was in the hands of the landowners and traditional architects, who used it as a means of reigning-in consumer cultures. During the 1930s, however, despite the complicated planning regulations discussed later in Part II, it was individual store owners who led the West End’s rebuilding, and the architecture they commissioned celebrated modern shopping.

This alignment with consumer culture can also be partly understood through the application of more sophisticated understandings of advertising and consumer psychology to retail design. Within this thinking, architecture could be reduced to a promotional tool along with window display, press advertisements and posters. *Commercial Art* claimed, ‘The direct appeal to the aesthetic sense that the shops exert is more effective in impressing

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<sup>106</sup> Emile Zola, *The Ladies’ Paradise*, Oxford University Press, 1998, 313.

<sup>107</sup> James, ‘From Messel to Mendlesohn’.

<sup>108</sup> *Commercial Art*, March 1930, 135.



the public with the concept of quality than any amount of persuasive advertising copy.’ Selfridges, for example, felt no need for a sign appended to the surface of its instantly recognisable façade: the building itself was a trademark and an advertisement.

During the 1930s, there is much evidence of the retailing profession’s heightened awareness of advertising. Simpsons was particularly attuned to this issue, and Part III will discuss the sophistication of the store’s display policy. The company also hired Crawfords, the leading advertising agency, to do their publicity, with the talented Ashley Havinden and, from 1938, Max Hoff working on the Simpsons account. *Art and Industry* noted the playfulness of the advertising campaign, drawing a stark contrast with the work of their main competitor,

Austin Reed ... mainly stick to a serious objectivity. Their advertising is sober and sometimes frigid, but it is convincing in its straightforward way. Austin Reed are afraid they might say too much. Hence their restraint. Simpson’s on the other hand, say much. They say it gaily, and do not mind too much if they are not wholly believed. They treat their own advertising as a sport ...<sup>109</sup>

These comments hint at the store’s use of advertising to construct a particular identity rather than inform about stock, an identity which this thesis shows drew together modern masculinity and new consumption cultures. In a letter to Emberton, Simpson drew an analogy between the store and an ocean liner, that great archetype of inter-war Modernism, ‘I feel very much like the captain of a big new ship waiting for the pilot in charge of the tugs to get him out of the dock, so that I can sail spick and span on my maiden voyage.’<sup>110</sup> Appropriately, Crawfords’ whole ethos was one of modernity. In promotional material of 1930, the company linked their aesthetic with the frenetic pace of urban life,

Taller, simpler buildings rising every day. Faster cars and aeroplanes linking city to city. Express lifts, express meals, express news and pictures. But nothing so swift as the pace with which ideas are moving, changing! Are you trying to sell to nineteen-thirty with the voice of nineteen-ten? Crawford advertising - never a minute old in manner or inspiration - is the work of young and up-to-date people whose minds are in tune with this urgent, modern world.<sup>111</sup>

In line with this image, in 1930, Crawfords had built their head quarters in Holborn, subsequently recognised as the first Modern office building in the country. It was designed

<sup>109</sup> *Art and Industry*, August 1937, 59.

<sup>110</sup> Letter from Alexander Simpson to Joseph Emberton, 20 April 1936, Simpsons Archive.

<sup>111</sup> *Commercial Art*, August 1930, p.iv.



by the architect Frederick Etchells, who had been responsible for the first English translation of Le Corbusier’s seminal *Vers une Architecture* in 1927.<sup>112</sup> By engaging this firm during the developmental stage of the store, ideas about the use of architecture as advertising were bound to influence the design and concept as a whole.

[Figures 7.8 and 7.9] There was an established tradition of using representations of store architecture within graphic advertising, particularly to advertise a new store.<sup>113</sup> Buildings often served as a shorthand for a store’s identity, seen for example in advertising campaigns for Marks and Spencer. This company built prolifically during the 1930s, mostly using the architect Robert Lutyens. They routinely used a depiction of a generic Marks and Spencer store façade to advertise the opening of a new store, precisely because the trademark architecture was an essential part of the branding. Yardley in Bond Street used an essentially similar strategy. The advertising manager explained: ‘We do not show representations of the factory in our publicity matter because it is not of interest to buyers of luxury articles such as our own. For preference we sometimes feature our shop in Bond Street, which is more suggestive of luxury goods both in style and locality ...’<sup>114</sup>

Given the premium placed on architecture by the store, it is initially surprising that Simpsons rarely used images of the building within its advertising. Instead the image of the ‘Simpsons man’ was foregrounded, a figure examined more closely in Chapter 13. A possible explanation is provided by the fact that one of the functions of using representations of architecture within graphic advertising was to *locate* the store within a street scene for the reader of the newspaper or magazine. As discussed in Part I, the name ‘Simpson Piccadilly’ itself fulfilled this function, and as this thesis argues, the more pressing concern for management was to enable potential customers to visualise themselves as the ‘Simpsons man’. The building was indeed subjugated to the overarching advertising aims of the company, rather than allowed to dictate the store’s image, but it was itself a powerful advertising tool.

However, it is certainly the case that the store’s façade was used as advertising within the street to indicate a modern clientele, to legitimise a new way of selling menswear, and thus to promote consumption. This advertising register was facilitated by Joseph Emberton’s

<sup>112</sup> Dean, *The Thirties*, 14.

<sup>113</sup> See, for example, the examples of Selfridges and Carson Pirie Scott advertisements illustrated in Siry, *Carson Pirie Scott*; Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*, Chapter 5.

<sup>114</sup> *Commercial Art*, March 1932, 107-111.



close association with the advertising world. He had designed the exhibition hall at Olympia in 1931 and he was the architectural director of several of the Advertising Association’s exhibitions from 1927. In addition, exhibition stands themselves formed a key part of his practice. In a lecture given to the Design and Industries Association in 1937, Emberton stressed the importance of the shopfront as publicity.<sup>115</sup> The priorities of the facade design were summarized by *Industrial Arts*: ‘In designing the front of the building consideration had to be given to four points; the need for a unified design; provision for floodlighting or other publicity effort; a surface which would withstand the action of dirt or could be cleaned; and the invitation of passers-by to enter the store.’<sup>116</sup> It would seem that the last function was the most essential. *Art and Industry*’s review of Simpsons perceived the subordination of ‘architecture’ to the function of the store, so that the fabric of the building was indeed essentially reduced to advertising,

In design, the store is of no architectural or academic ‘order’, it fulfils its function floor by floor and borrows nothing from M. Corbusier. In fact I would say that ... the store ceases to be architectural in conception and becomes spectacular display. This is merchandising at its best. ... a store, in every respect, is an extension of the advertising idea, an idea that should permeate the whole building; façade; fittings; window; signs; and even down to the garments of the commissionaires and sales people. It should be the union of the architectural and merchandising. Taking his courage in one hand and Mr. Joseph Emberton in the other, Mr. Alec Simpson has got nearer to this association of the spectacular and the commercial as a total display, than has any other store I know of.<sup>117</sup>

Peter Jones was a rather different case. Although Crabtree, like Emberton, had been influenced by Mendelsohn, for a building to function effectively as advertising, there needed to be co-ordination on this point between the store management and the architectural team. John Spedan Lewis denied the symbolic function of the building. Indeed, he did not believe in advertising either through architecture or through the press, preferring to secure a loyal customer base by conveying a reputation for quality and value through word of mouth. The striking building still functioned as an emblem for the store’s identity; it was simply that the owner, by failing to comprehend the nature of the architecture he had commissioned, was less in command of the messages it sent.

Simpsons’ more integrated approach might have made good business sense, but also created a potentially problematic relationship with Modernism. The advertising function

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<sup>115</sup> *Cabinet Maker*, January 1937, 14.

<sup>116</sup> *Industrial Arts* Summer 1936, 94.

<sup>117</sup> *Art and Industry*, July 1936, 18.



further accentuated the role of ‘surface’, which, as has been shown, was architecturally controversial, attracting charges of vulgarity and divergence from Modern principles. For example, architect Hugh Casson claimed, ‘the advertising value of dramatic design has encouraged modernistic design for shops and departmental stores ... The commonest faults are exaggerated vertical or horizontal emphasis, shoddy workmanship and ephemeral smartness.’<sup>118</sup> This problematic should not however be overplayed. Simpsons’ architectural integrity was maintained through its careful construction of a Modern pedigree, and was excepted from Casson’s criticism for this reason, along with Peter Jones. Indeed Colomina suggests that despite attempts to contain, suppress and deny advertising within architecture, an engagement with mass culture through the media was a defining characteristic of Modern architecture, whether or not it was openly acknowledged.<sup>119</sup>

‘THE MOST FUNCTIONALLY DESIGNED RETAIL EMPORIUM IN THIS  
COUNTRY’: ARCHITECTURE, GENDER AND FASHIONABLE CONSUMPTION  
PETER JONES

This thesis has already argued for the centrality of gender within 1930s shopping cultures. The following section uses case studies of Peter Jones and Simpsons to show the ways feminine and masculine consumption cultures were respectively inscribed on their Modern façades and interiors, looking at how architecture contributed significantly to the varied gendering of the West End and its consumer cultures. It describes how themes of shopping and gender were entwined with the discourse of the Modern shop, but that the complex and contested relationship between gender, Modernism and retail was configured differently within each building. One aim is to reassess the supposed exclusion of femininity from Modernism. This section highlights the association between ‘masculine’ Modernist architecture and the ‘feminine’ consumer cultures of Peter Jones. It also identifies the subtleties within the Modernist style that enabled it to convey Simpsons’ essential masculinity within the same temporal and geographical context. Although apparently contradictory, read together, these case studies contribute to the argument made in Chapter 6 that British architectural Modernism of the 1930s was a broad category, housing varieties and tensions. In making these arguments, the study points to the underlying centrality of dress and fashion within this discourse on gender, shopping and architecture. In the 1930s

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<sup>118</sup> *Chain and Multiple Store*, 8 October 1938.

<sup>119</sup> Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity*.



West End, Modern architecture was specifically involved in the processes of selling fashionable clothes to consumers, which draws in the previous discussion of Modern architecture's relationship with novelty and spectacle.

As we have seen, Peter Jones was an uncompromisingly Modern shop with a largely female clientele. Thus it raises questions about the traditional exclusion of women and the feminine, or indeed acknowledgement of the pivotal position of gender, in the practice and historiography of modernism, in its broadest cultural definitions. This issue has recently been highlighted by theorists with feminist agendas, interpreting women's absence as indicative of modernism's collusion with patriarchy.<sup>120</sup> The misogynist nature of early twentieth-century Modernist architectural theory, which characterised Modernism and modernity as definitely masculine, has been much discussed. This section draws particularly on work which explores the relationship between Modernism and its feminine 'other', challenging the application of the 'separate spheres' ideology to Modernism by showing how that which was claimed as 'other' was an integral part of the Modern and the Modernist, despite, indeed because of, being constantly denied.<sup>121</sup> Rather than seek to re-establish Modernism within the feminine, domestic, private sphere of the home as some have done,<sup>122</sup> this study locates the feminine and Modernism together in the public space of the city.

Wigley, Colomina and Breward have all explored the role of dress and fashion within Modernist Loosian and Corbusian discourse.<sup>123</sup> Dress, was not in itself consistently reviled within this discourse, indeed it was integral to it as a metaphor with which to discuss good and bad design. For Loos, the dinner suit was an example of a commodity which had reached its ultimate design; a lesson for Modern architecture: 'When I was finally given the task of building a house, I said to myself: in its external appearance, a house can only have changed as much as a dinner jacket. Not a lot therefore. ... I had to become significantly simpler. I had to substitute the golden buttons with black ones. The house has

<sup>120</sup> Wolff, defining modernism as a broader cultural phenomenon, identifies women's exclusion from the canon of modernism, and partially from the practice of modernism, as resulting from modernism's concern with the public sphere: a result of the new urban consciousness and alienation post-WW1, experiences from which she sees women as having been excluded, mirroring an exclusion from modernity. She suggests the canon should be reassessed, rather than accepting that modernism inaccessible to women. Wolff, *Feminine Sentences*, 57

<sup>121</sup> Agrest et al., *The Sex of Architecture*, 12. Mark Anderson, *Kafka's Clothes: Ornament and Aestheticism in the Habsburg Fin de Siècle*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992. Christopher Breward, 'Fashioning Masculinity: Men's Footwear and Modernity' in Benstock, Shari and Ferris, Suzanne (eds.) *Footnotes: On Shoes*, New Brunswick, New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press, 2001, Colomina, *Sexuality and Space*; Friedman, *Women and the Making of the Modern House*; Reed, *Not at Home*; Ward, *Weimar Surfaces*; Wigley, *White Walls, Designer Dresses*.

<sup>122</sup> See for example, Leslie and Reimer, 'Gender, Modern Design and Home Consumption'; Reed, *Hot at Home*.

<sup>123</sup> Breward, 'Fashioning Masculinity'; Colomina, *Sexuality and Space*; Wigley, *White Walls, Designer Dresses*.



to look inconspicuous.'<sup>124</sup> [Figure 7.10] Similarly, masculine clothing was famously included in Le Corbusier's typologies of Modern, and significantly masculine, design, presented as 'standardised', stable and modern, stripped of decoration, like the flat-roofed, white-walled Corbusian building. For example, he wrote in *Vers une Architecture*: 'Our modern life ... has created its own objects: its costume, its fountain pen, its eversharp pencil, its typewriter, its telephone, its admirable office furniture, its plate-glass and its 'Innovation' trunks, the safety razor and the briar pipe, the bowler hat and the limousine, the steamship and the airplane.'<sup>125</sup>

Fashion, however, was altogether more problematic, because it was ephemeral and was seen as an essential characteristic of feminine dress. Both Wigley and Breward identify a blatant misogyny in the Modernists' use of the dress analogy to distance their movement from the operation of fashion; female clothing used as a tool to denigrate the decorative excesses of previous architectural and design movements. Wigley exposes Modernism's long-standing refusal to acknowledge the actual role of fashion within its theories as a reluctance to face a reading of Modernist architecture as fashionable clothing for the building's structure. He sees such a reading as inherent in the theories themselves, which prioritised, and fetishised, the white surfaces of Modernist buildings, bringing us back to the problem of the façade in Modern buildings.<sup>126</sup>

This theoretical backdrop would suggest that designing a Modern building for Peter Jones would be a conceptual minefield; the architecture in constant tension with, or denial of, the consumers and goods. However, by the 1930s, changes had occurred within women's fashion cultures that were accompanied by a partial change of heart by contemporary theorists. [Figure 7.11] Inter-war women's fashions themselves were seen as increasingly functional, modern, even Modern; drawing references from sportswear and the suit. Colomina notes that this lead Le Corbusier to praise women's fashion over men's because

<sup>124</sup> Cited in Colomina, *Sexuality and Space*, 107

<sup>125</sup> Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, 1923, reproduced in Le Corbusier, *Essential Le Corbusier: L'Esprit Nouveau Articles*, Oxford: Architectural Press, 1998, 95.

<sup>126</sup> Breward uses early twentieth-century men's footwear to think about clothing as a strategy for constructing a 'modern' masculine identity, a conception of the 'modern' which related to the Modernist discourse, with its own treatment of the masculine shoe. He draws a parallel between 19<sup>th</sup> century dandyism and the Modernist discourse, identifying in the latter the fetishisation of masculine dress, which facilitated an avoidance of considering both the role of fashion within its design and function, and also of the 'bespoke' rather than mass produced means of production of such items. 'As the black-coated, exquisitely booted citizen of the 1820s the lace-bedecked and high-heeled courtier of the ancien regime while covertly pursuing the pleasures of fashionable consumption with equal energy, so the modernist arbiter of taste critiqued the modishly ephemeral while fetishizing a myth of durability and the supremacy of the 'moral' object that still prioritised surface impressions.' Breward, 'Fashioning Masculinity', 118.



it had undergone *change*, in line with the modernity of the time.<sup>127</sup>

Peter Jones was a West End favourite with fashion editors at *Vogue* during the 1930s, placing the goods on sale there in the context of a self-consciously modern mouthpiece for fashionable, feminine consumption cultures. This magazine reflected a significant, if implicit, engagement between architecture, fashion and femininity in the 1930s. Certainly the professional architectural press revealed a significant lack of women or femininity in any form in its photographic coverage of new buildings, and *Vogue* did not regularly concern itself overtly with architecture, other than interior decoration. There were, however, occasional articles on architecture and design, such as ‘A New London’ on the rash of new West End shops,<sup>128</sup> which reveal that connections were being made between the magazine as an embodiment of the modern woman and Modern architecture’s ability to communicate the modernity of modern British femininity.

Modern art, design and architecture were used by *Vogue* as the setting for the fashion features, and were used as a backdrop for the fashionable female figure. The textual concern with modern femininity and graphic representation of the Modern environment created an implicit dialogue between the two. One shopping columnist quipped, ‘London clothes are lovelier than ever, settings for those clothes are so well designed that the modern town planners could with advantage steal ideas for future utopias from the stores.’<sup>129</sup> [Figure 7.12] The fashion system and architecture were furthermore used as metaphors for each other, as in this editorial from American *Vogue*, illustrated by the Chrysler building towering above the Eiffel Tower as a metaphor for the importance of New York in the modern fashion system,

We are in the hands of our dressmakers. We are in the process of construction. The architects in Paris have designed for us. Now, it is up to the contractors. The vendeuses, the fitters, and all the little buttonhole makers are working on us with pins for rivets and fresh spring stuffs for building materials. And when at last we emerge from our scaffoldings of crisscross bastings, our façades will be excitingly modern. We shall be looking tall and svelte.<sup>130</sup>

Peter Jones can be read as a response to the need for a building suitable for a newly mechanised fashion industry and Modern fashions, as well as to the new ways of selling

<sup>127</sup> Colomina, *Sexuality and Space*, 126

<sup>128</sup> ‘A New London’, *Vogue*, 5 August 1936, 8-13.

<sup>129</sup> ‘Shop-hound: tips on the shop market’, *Vogue*, 3 April 1935, 102.

<sup>130</sup> *Vogue* (New York), 26 April 1930, 35.



and buying such goods. As discussed, the newly rebuilt Peter Jones department store in Sloane Square was feted for its Modernism, particularly its ground-breaking structure and its experimental skin of glass. However, it also appealed to reviewers and the store owner alike because of its modern functionality. The *News Chronicle* cited Peter Jones as one of only a few modern buildings whose purpose was truly related to its aesthetic,<sup>131</sup> *Store* describing it as ‘the most functionally designed retail emporium in this country.’<sup>132</sup> John Spedan Lewis’s stated aim was to provide an efficient retail environment in which the priorities were space and display potential rather than modernity of surface. In selling the design of the building to the partners within the staff magazine, he claimed that no preconceived ideas about aesthetic had been brought to the drawing board, but that it had been designed to meet the practical criteria of lightness, ease of circulation, display space, flexibility and economy, claiming: ‘We set to work deliberately to design a building that should answer to this specification. We endeavoured not to ask ourselves at all whether it would be exactly like some other shop or utterly different from any shop anywhere.’<sup>133</sup> He claimed the design was ‘the sort of building that would be used by the community for its shops if nobody had ever seen a shop before, and everybody wanted the shop to be as efficient as possible for its purpose.’ Of course, this essentially functionalist approach was a key tenet of Modernism. Although Spedan Lewis did not frame his argument in these terms, the architecture was clearly being suggested as a means to communicate ‘efficiency’.

The balance of concerns between efficiency and architecture were clearly expressed in the Building Committee’s discussion on light wells, in which John Spedan Lewis opined, ‘if there was to be daylight upon the ground floor itself, it should be of the utmost possible and certainly none of it should be sacrificed merely for an appearance of architectural tidiness and symmetry.’<sup>134</sup> Indeed ‘Modern’ characteristics of the building frequently appealed to the retailer for practical reasons: the steel structure facilitated unencumbered and flexible selling space; the curtain walling ensured economy and temperature control; the continuous ground floor glazing provided uninterrupted display space. The functional rationality of the building’s design can thus be seen to represent more of the pragmatic

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<sup>131</sup> *News Chronicle*, 15 October 1937.

<sup>132</sup> *Store*, October 1936, 3.

<sup>133</sup> *Gazette of the John Lewis Partnership*, 13 April 1935, 230.

<sup>134</sup> Minutes of Building Committee 25 April 1933 John Lewis Partnership Archive, 2668/a.



inter-war ‘culture of restraint’ described by Winship than the showy Victorian and Edwardian consumer cultures which prioritised extravagant spectacle in retail design.<sup>135</sup>

However, it is argued here that the refusal of the store owner to acknowledge the symbolic nature of its Modern architecture was significant. In contrast to Simpsons Piccadilly, the architects certainly believed that the architecture’s relationship with the retail function was not entirely successful, resulting from the less symbiotic relationship between architects and store owner. According to Richmond, the relationship between the designers and the store management proved a fraught one, eventually resulting in Crabtree’s dismissal from the partnership.<sup>136</sup> Architect Charles Reilly drew a comparison with Simpsons, ‘strong without and elegant within’, and Peter Jones, ‘elegant without but with poor electric lighting and not very happily arranged fixtures within - not the fault of the architects, I can swear to that.’<sup>137</sup> This points to the partial perpetuation of a tension between Modernism and feminine shopping cultures, also expressed in D. H. Evans’s commemorative brochure, ‘The whole building is the last word in modernity and yet in policy, in staff, in standards of merchandise *it is still the same D. H. Evans* - a draper’s shop devoted to the needs of women and children.’<sup>138</sup> [emphasis added] John Spedan Lewis was clearly ambivalent about Modernism per se, which made it difficult for the architecture relate closely to the retail function.

#### ‘A CERTAIN TYPE OF SHOP, ADAPTED TO HABITS OF MEN TO-DAY’: MODERN ARCHITECTURE, SUITS AND THE MASCULINE CONSUMER AT SIMPSONS

A study of Simpsons reveals a building that did not shy away from engagement with consumption and fashionable clothing. Here Modernism functioned as a strategy for marking out and legitimising modern masculinity through the use of ‘serious’ and Modern architecture. The integration of architecture and retailing circumvented much of the criticism from some quarters that the spectacular nature of Modern shops had led to competition between goods and building for the customer’s attention.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Winship, ‘Culture of Restraint’.

<sup>136</sup> Richmond, *Marketing Modernisms*, 170-172.

<sup>137</sup> *The Architects’ Journal* 14 January 1937, 102.

<sup>138</sup> D. H. Evans of Oxford Street’s brochure, 1937, John Lewis Partnership Archive 422/3.

<sup>139</sup> ‘Occasionally there seems to be a fight between the architecture of the shop and the things inside it, as if the former were trying to distract attention from the latter... The building must provide a framework for the merchandise, and not a rival centre of attraction.’ A. Trystan Edwards, *The Architecture of Shops*, London: Chapman and Hall, 1933, 45.



It is significant that the dominant voice of contemporary Modernist architectural theory associated Modernism with the masculine, despite the incursions of projects such as Peter Jones. The store's façade was designed to promote consumption through its spectacular nature, but Simpsons was elegant, solid, its stone surface lending the exterior an air of permanence with distanced itself from novelty and fleeting fashion. [Figures 7.13 and 7.14] The interiors were carefully styled with the 'modern' in mind, furnished with elegant bent-ply and tubular steel, fitted with the most up-to-date fixtures for which Europe had been scoured. Its brand of modern shop design drew on a visual typography already established within men's retail, seen in Westwood and Emberton's work for Austin Reed.<sup>140</sup> But whereas Austin Reed's Regent Street shop was described by Ind as a 'hybrid', the exterior a combination of Westwood and Emberton's shopfront and elevations by anti-Modernist Blomfield, and with 'themed' rooms inside,<sup>141</sup> Simpsons presented a coherent message about modernity and masculinity.

The store papers show that like John Spedan Lewis, Alexander Simpson was a pragmatist in his general approach to retailing. Simpsons was not just a fashionable modern building bought off-the-peg; it was carefully designed around the perceived needs of the modern man. Like Peter Jones the building's Modern features served important retail functions; the innovative shop window at Simpsons exemplified the Modern curve, but was non-reflective, maximising the effect of display, and the dramatic staircase encouraged circulation. However, most importantly, Simpsons' interior was highly honed to the purpose of selling men's clothes, as *Industrial Arts* recognised, 'Mr Emberton was presented with the problem of producing a certain type of shop, adapted to habits of men to-day, on a fixed site... In designing Simpson's, Mr Emberton was to provide a man's shop at once specialised and comprehensive in character.'<sup>142</sup> Here, the experience with Austin Reed proved fruitful. The *Brick Builder* had written of the new Austin Reed Bloomsbury head quarters in 1926, 'the appearance of the building should symbolise the purity of goods they sell and so they have chosen unrelieved buff glazed terra-cotta as the

<sup>140</sup> Dean describes it as 'a restrained up-market house style which contrived to be in tune with the modern commercial world, and was to appear in many major cities over the succeeding decades.' Dean, *The Thirties: Recalling the English Architectural Scene*, 92.

<sup>141</sup> 'the store was organised in a series of rooms, each of a different style – 'Chinese', 'Tudor', 'Modern' Only the lift gates seem to be unselfconsciously of their time; Percy Metcalf's metal-work is fair and square in the Ruhlmann style of Paris 1925.' Ind, *Emberton*, 16–17.

<sup>142</sup> *Industrial Arts*, Summer 1936, 88



material that would best support the stainless radiance of their shirt-fronts, and the famous ‘Summit’ collars, and be, moreover, as easily washed.’<sup>143</sup>

[Figure 4.21] When photographs of the new Simpsons building appeared in the architectural press, the store’s interior was shown as a collection of empty spaces, but these spaces were actually deliberately moulded around the ‘Simpsons man’ and his clothes. The images of the empty store, a conventional form for architectural photography, also reveal a set of stages for the display of garments and for the performances of selling and shopping, routes to draw the customer through the shop floor and send him spiralling up the building’s core.

Correspondence between store owner and architect show it was planned meticulously to house specific retail practices and departments,

I return herewith your plan and have indicated on the ground floor how the sections should be split up ... I have left out beach wear and swimming costumes, which is a seasonal department, but as it takes so little space, I leave you to find a spot for it. You will see that I have brought the shoe and hat department into the ground floor in Jermyn Street, which if it can be got in comfortably I think an advantage. This leaves the basement absolutely free, except for a really nice hairdressing department, which should be adjacent to the lift.<sup>144</sup>

[Figure 7.15] The building was also designed around precise numbers of garments, one letter from Simpson specifying accommodation for items including twelve thousand lounge suits, three hundred riding coats, two thousand two hundred and fifty hats, fifty suit lengths for bespoke tailoring and a stock of overcoats that would vary according to the season.<sup>145</sup> Interiors drew on the traditional fittings of men’s outfitters: efficient, neatly categorised filing systems for the retrieval of men’s clothes. But these rational systems were also in tune with the Modern, Austin Reed’s display man using a Corbusian vocabulary to describe the shops as ‘machines to sell in’<sup>146</sup>

<sup>143</sup> *The Brick Builder*, November 1926, 42

<sup>144</sup> Letter from Alexander Simpson to Joseph Emberton, 11 May 1935, Simpsons Archive.

<sup>145</sup> Letter from Alexander Simpson to Joseph Emberton, 29 August 1935, Simpsons Archive

<sup>146</sup> Ed A. Edward Hammond, *Men’s Wear Display: A Practical Work on Window Showmanship and Interior Planning and Equipment*, London: Caxton c.1930, 92



Simpsons was almost literally tailor-made to fit its customer: the design process was characterised by a preoccupation with the dimensions of the male body, exemplified by a particular unrealised scheme:

one would arrange to have the wardrobes for, shall we say, regular height men on the ground floor and for the short and tall and stout men on the first floor, and it would not matter whether a man wanted a lounge suit, a sports suit, an overcoat or a pair of pyjamas, we would be enabled in this manner and with the aid of our wardrobe to shew him almost everything we stocked in selling him the one article.<sup>147</sup>

The detailed descriptions of planning and building in the store records reveal a store owner who was extremely closely engaged with these processes, often sending his own sketches to the architect.<sup>148</sup> As an obituary recalled, ‘He was on the site almost every day it was being built, worrying the life out of builders and architects, scrapping the most expensive installations if they showed the slightest flaw.’<sup>149</sup> Yet, like at Peter Jones, there were tensions within the building. This was partly because, as Part IV will explore, the new consumer identities expressed in this architecture were not stable, and the focus on traditional tailoring alongside ready-to-wear created a potential inconsistency in the equation between Modern architecture and modern masculine dress.<sup>150</sup>

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Part II has argued that the 1930s was a distinctive period in the history of retail architecture when the opening of dramatic new stores coincided with a significant realignment of the relationship between shopping and architecture. A Modernism emerged that was entwined with consumption cultures and practices, creating stores moulded around the modern consumer and their clothes. Simpsons and Peter Jones were iconic, exceptional buildings, but they were also representative of a broader trend within retail architecture. They were certainly Modern in style, materials and construction. But this thesis argues that they conveyed a modernity greater than the sum of their novel architectural parts, and that to reduce the new retail architecture to a display of novelty and fashionability would be to underestimate the complexity of its symbolism.

<sup>147</sup> Letter from Alexander Simpson to Joseph Emberton c. 1935, Simpsons Archive.

<sup>148</sup> For example, Letters from Alexander Simpson to Joseph Emberton, 29 April 1935 and 4 August 1935.

<sup>149</sup> Obituary, *Textile Mercury and Argus*, 21 May 1937.

<sup>150</sup> Wigley and Breward discuss Loos’ and Corbusier’s belief in the standardisation and ‘stability’ of male clothing, and the slightly contradictory focus on tailored/crafted classic types rather than factory-produced items.



By the 1930s, the key elements of department store design - the dramatic façade with extensive display windows, the massive steel skeleton that allowed the building dominating scale within the street scene, and cavernous interiors for the display and sale of goods - were no longer new. Compared to the Victorian department store, Simpsons and Peter Jones were experimenting in the detail. Yet they were consistently acknowledged in popular and professional spheres as fundamentally and unprecedentedly modern. Part II has argued that the Modernist vocabulary of the store façade communicated a modernity which forged links with international networks of the Modern, but that it also made connections with the local conditions of the West End street by engaging with its built fabric, its street networks and its shopping cultures.

The modernity of the new West End retail building must be set alongside its piecemeal nature. It was instigated by individual retailers rather than state planners or the big landowners, and did not constitute an overarching Modern urban reordering of the sort expounded in Corbusian rhetoric and the Mars plan. This did not, however, diminish its importance. On the contrary, it has been argued that the shifting dynamic between Modernism and retail created buildings that were particularly vibrant, successful and sensitive to the nuances of West End consumer culture. The architecture of Peter Jones prioritised a message of efficiency, modern methods and value in feminine consumption, whereas Simpsons conveyed a more coherent evocation of the modern spirit of the new masculine consumption.

In arguing for the connection between consumer cultures and architecture, Part II has questioned the dichotomy between Modernism and feminine shopping cultures suggested by the Corbusian rhetoric that came to dominate subsequent readings of inter-war Modernism. The perceptible reassessment of retail architecture, formerly considered somewhat disposable, ephemeral, and rather beneath the attention of the architectural establishment, was not unrelated to the emergence of new masculine and feminine consumer identities, and did not necessarily involve an apparent denial of those identities, as Wigley's reasoning might suggest.<sup>151</sup> The thriving new consumer cultures enabled individual retailers to transform their buildings, giving Modernism an entrée into the West End.

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<sup>151</sup> Wigley, *White Walls, designer Dresses*.



This study thus draws a stark contrast with Rappaport’s story of the dominance of traditional, imperial retail architecture in the West End during previous decades,<sup>152</sup> and with James’ description of Mendelsohn’s engagement with the new democratic and mass-produced commodities in the inter-war Schocken stores in Germany.<sup>153</sup> It is argued that the West End’s Modern stores celebrated the exuberant, pleasurable, and ephemeral shopping that took place there. The Modern shops of the 1930s West End, although still contested, were less culturally troubling than the architecture of Regent Street, less politically charged than the Schocken stores, and also did not inspire the same class-based disdain as the Woolworth stores on London’s arterial roads, suburban centres and provincial towns.<sup>154</sup>

Ultimately, Part II calls for attention to be paid to the specificity of place. The Modern shop was crucial in providing the structure, the spaces and the surfaces of *Vogue*’s ‘New London’. But it has also been argued that West End retail architecture was more than a backdrop or stage for the shopping practices that took place there, it was an active medium for expressing certain ideas about those practices; notably gender, class, ephemerality and modernity. Architecture can therefore be seen to be dynamically related to the other areas of focus in this thesis: routes and networks, spectacle and consumer identities.

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<sup>152</sup> Rappaport, ‘Art, Commerce, or Empire?’, 98.

<sup>153</sup> James, ‘From Messel to Mendelsohn’.

<sup>154</sup> J. B. Priestley, *English Journey*, London: Heinemann, 1934, 401.



### III

## ‘TO LOOK AT THE SHOPS’: THE SPECTACLE OF THE WEST END’S SHOPPING STREETS



## 8.

### INTRODUCTION III

Women stream into London in tens of thousands just ‘to look at the shops’

(‘Shopping - Then and Now’, *Vogue*, 1 September 1937, 92.)

The article ‘Shopping - Then and Now’ pointed both to the centrality of ‘looking’ within 1930s West End shopping cultures and suggested that something rather spectacular was being staged at the shops, capable of drawing shoppers into the heart of the capital and catching their attention. Part III develops the exploration of visual communication between the shop and the street begun in Part II. The focus moves beyond the relative solid permanency of the shop’s architecture to the ephemeral practices taking place in the less tangible layer between the shop and the street: in the half-way space of the shop window, the applied cloak of decorations and light, and the celebratory pageant. Part III is essentially about how this layer of window display, lighting, façades decoration and pageantry constituted the ‘staging’ of both the identities of individual stores and of West End shopping cultures in general. The primary function from the store’s point of view was to forge a relationship with the consumer and with the West End as a place. However, the store owners, their design and display teams, and their dummies did not constitute the only directors and actors: it was a theatre in which at times consumers were active participants as well as audience.

The role of ‘spectacle’ and ‘novelty’, attributes routinely ascribed to modern retail culture, is re-examined, moving beyond an understanding of these as strategies to dazzle and tempt



female consumers. Whilst the staging of shopping in these ways undoubtedly *was* spectacular, its use and reception was altogether more ‘knowing’ than it had been in Victorian and Edwardian London, articulated through a language of display, decoration and pageant that was well understood by retailers, architects, consumers and cultural commentators. *Vogue* expressed the pleasures of being consciously manipulated by the modern showmanship of stores, ‘The shop sells atmosphere and atmosphere sells you.’<sup>1</sup>

Part III further argues that the kinds of shopping spectacle considered here communicated particular messages about the 1930s West End and its consumer cultures. The first message relates to retail’s drive for novelty, which has always been most apparent in its use of spectacle. In the 1930s, this was expressed both through a startlingly Modern language of display, and the focus on a new audience. West End retail spectacle used a language of display, desire and psychology that had previously been largely reserved for female consumers to attract a certain group of male consumers: it was *this* audience for whom the displays, the decorations, the pageants were be essentially new. Gender, then, in constant dialogue with class and modernity, was a key element of the theatre of shopping. Secondly, the very ephemerality of the media through which the staging was conducted: the weekly display changes, the daily transformation of the shop façade with light, the periodic participation in celebrations and festivals, drew the shops into a close relationship with the self-consciously fleeting and constantly evolving nature of the 1930s city, its inhabitants and consumption practices, which this thesis argues was a key characteristic of West End modernity at this time. Thirdly, it is significant that the practices were infused by their location in the West End, and, more specifically, in the shopping, which has been established as crucial to an understanding of 1930s shopping cultures in previous chapters. This is why the forms of theatre taking place at the junction of shop and street, rather than, for example, in store interiors, or newspaper and magazine advertisements, is especially pertinent to this study of shopping cultures for which place was so important. In its engagement with place, however, the theatre communicated an international and national as well as local positioning for the West End, adding another dimension to the connections established in Part I.

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<sup>1</sup> ‘A New London’, *Vogue*, 5 August 1936, 8-13.



## LITERATURE REVIEW

In historical debates about late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century shopping and consumption, ‘spectacle’ has been a major preoccupation. It has been as one of the defining characteristics of burgeoning modern consumer culture, and, conversely, shopping has been positioned prominently with accounts of urban modernity *because* of its visual nature. Leach, Miller, Reekie and Williams among others have highlighted the association between spectacle and the specific format of the department store, with respect to a new emphasis on the visual, the stimulation of female desires to consume, and the celebration of novelty.<sup>2</sup> However, adequate consideration has not been given to how the use of spectacle might have evolved with the maturity of the department store and indeed, of consumer cultures in general.

By making these connection between the spectacular practices of department stores and modernity, department store studies have drawn on a body of work on the modern city. Here, urban spectacle has been identified as a key characteristic of the ephemeral, fleeting nature of the new metropolis. The theory of the role of spectacle in modern life was established by Debord’s polemic, *The Society of the Spectacle* in which he posited, ‘The whole life of those societies in which modern conditions of production prevail presents itself as an immense accumulation of *spectacles*.’<sup>3</sup> Subsequent studies have delved into specific instances of the spectacular, and specular, in particular modern cities, for example Schlör’s study of night and lighting in Paris, Berlin and London, and Ward’s exploration of the urban visual cultures of Weimar Germany.<sup>4</sup>

Historians have repeatedly made connections between shopping and the exhibitionary cultures developed from the nineteenth century, frequently citing London’s Great Exhibition of 1851 as a moment when spectacle, commodity culture and modernity collided.<sup>5</sup> Williams goes as far as describing the Paris Exposition of 1900 as ‘a scale model of the consumer revolution.’<sup>6</sup> This association continues to be an important theme for the inter-war years, although the nature of the spectacle shared by shops and exhibitions was specific to that period. Gronberg, for

<sup>2</sup> Leach, *Land of Desire*; Miller, *The Bon Marche*; Reekie, *Temptations*; Williams, *Dream Worlds*.

<sup>3</sup> Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, New York: Zone Books, 1994, 12. (Translated from the original of 1967.)

<sup>4</sup> Schlör, *Nights in the Big City*; Ward, *Weimar Surfaces*.

<sup>5</sup> Bowlby, Breward, Leach, Rappaport, Richards and Williams all highlight the way department stores drew on exhibitionary cultures. Bowlby, *Just Looking*, 2; Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*; Thomas Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and Spectacle, 1851 – 1914*, London: Verso, 1990; Williams, *Dream Worlds*.

<sup>6</sup> Williams, *Dream Worlds*, 64.



example, has described how Parisian department stores were important sponsors of the 1925 *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs* in Paris. In 1930s Britain, a similar cultural closeness is suggested by the enormously popular trade exhibitions such as ‘Ideal Home,’ where commodities and consumer lifestyles were actively promoted.<sup>7</sup> Also notable in this period was the crossover between retail and exhibition design professionals, already discussed in Part II.

Shops and exhibitions were not only united by their staging of spectacle, but also by the central activity of ‘looking’ within modern consumption cultures, and indeed within modern urban life. In this respect, recent studies have utilised concepts of the ‘gaze’ developed within art and film history. The agenda set out by Mulvey in her seminal discussion of the various gendered and erotic gazes at play in film, using a language of psychoanalytic theory, has been especially influential.<sup>8</sup> Gronberg’s study of the boutique exhibits at the 1925 Paris *Exposition* has provided a useful model for this thesis, suggesting that spectacle was an integral part of the brand of modernity infused by femininity and consumption evident in the exhibit, sets up as an alternative model to the Corbusian, masculine, Modernist, anti-consumption version of modernity also present at the *Exposition*.<sup>9</sup>

‘Looking’ has been identified as a key pastime of successive generations of urban ‘types’. The Baudelairean *flâneur* of late nineteenth-century Paris has received the most attention, epitomising the advent of modern urban life.<sup>10</sup> But such a type has a longer history, as shown by Rendell’s work which positioned the early nineteenth-century ‘rambler’ between the London ‘spy’ of the sixteenth to eighteenth century and the *flâneur*, in a genealogy of male urban inhabitants.<sup>11</sup> In this story of the consumption of the city through ‘looking’, the male gaze has been the predominant concern, a gaze which was directed at a female object, and which simultaneously consumed her and turned her into part of the urban spectacle. However, the recent studies of feminine window-shopping at the late nineteenth-century department store have encouraged a shift of interest to the *female* gaze. Leach describes how store owners deliberately stimulated the female eye through their construction of ‘a constantly expanding landscape of glass’.<sup>12</sup> Bowlby suggests that within this nineteenth-century shopping

<sup>7</sup> Ryan, *The Ideal Home through the Twentieth Century*.

<sup>8</sup> Laura Mulvey, ‘Visual Pleasure and narrative cinema’, in *Visual and Other Pleasures*, London: Macmillan, 1989. The essay was first published in *Screen* in 1975.

<sup>9</sup> Gronberg, *Designs on Modernity*.

<sup>10</sup> See for example, Keith Tester (ed.), *The Flâneur*, London and New York; Routledge, 1994.

<sup>11</sup> Rendell, ‘Rambblers and Cyprians’, 145.

<sup>12</sup> Leach, *Land of Desire*, 55.



environment, ‘looking’ became more important than the actual transaction within shopping cultures, and indeed constituted the commodity itself.<sup>13</sup>

Part III argues for the continued importance of ‘looking’ within 1930s consumption cultures, which had a significant impact on the relationship between shopper/viewer and the retail building, displays and commodities. It examines how retailers continued to play to the eye, and consumers agreed to participate, and thus perpetuated the role of shopping as theatre. *Vogue* certainly wrote of a heightened contemporary visual awareness within 1930s consumer cultures, which it explained in terms of changed attitudes towards leisure shopping and the obligation to buy:

[In 1916] you were not in any way encouraged to ‘look around’. ‘Looking around’ was deemed a highly suspicious pastime ... A far cry from 1937, when women stream into London in tens of thousands just ‘to look at the shops’, when every aisle in the large stores is thronged with men and women who look upon shopping as a prime relaxation, an education and a sensuous pleasure.<sup>14</sup>

The concept of ‘desire’ has also been prominent in historians’ discussion of retail spectacle. The story of the emergence of modern shopping in the nineteenth century has foregrounded retailers’ attempts to sell large volumes of manufactured goods, by stimulating and manipulating (usually female) consumers’ desires with their increasingly sophisticated window displays, opulent internal displays of goods, eye-catching architecture and advertising, and conversely the pleasures of these fantasies and desires experienced by female shoppers.<sup>15</sup> Zola’s *Au Bonheur des Dames* set the agenda in this respect. He painted his store owner preying on feminine desires, ‘Mouret’s sole passion was the conquest of Woman. He wanted her to be queen in his shop; he had built this temple for her in order to hold her at his mercy. His tactics were to intoxicate her with amorous attentions, to trade on her desires, and to exploit her excitement.’<sup>16</sup> Desire has similarly been an important theme in broader studies of consumption cultures, for example the discussion by Scanlon of the ‘inarticulate longings’ engendered women’s magazines.<sup>17</sup> Through this discussion of desire, spectacle has been linked to contemporary rhetoric about class instability, feminine moral decline and most of all to concerns about shoplifting, and thus shopping became positioned by historians as a social

<sup>13</sup> Bowlby, *Just Looking*, 1.

<sup>14</sup> ‘Shopping - Then and Now’, *Vogue*, 1 September 1937, 92

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*; Williams, *Dream Worlds*, Chapter 3.

<sup>16</sup> Emile Zola, *The Ladies’ Paradise*, Oxford University Press, 1998, 234.

<sup>17</sup> Scanlon, *Inarticulate Longings*. See the discussion of ‘dreaming’ through magazine reading in Part IV.



problem.<sup>18</sup> Drawing on the polemic contained in Zola's *Au Bonheur des Dames*, historians have highlighted a close link between the emphasis on the visual and desire. In the late nineteenth century, desires for material possessions have been seen to become more sensual fantasies surrounding the act of consumption, so that commodities gained a new eroticised meaning divorced from their physicality and use. Bowlby, for example, has written, 'With the advent of the department store, selling ... [becomes] independent of the objects with which it deals, and by the same token, 'shopping' as a distinctive pursuit has no inherent connection with the procuring of predetermined requirements.'<sup>19</sup> The irrationality and instability of shopping practices suggested by this link between desire and visibility have made the unpacking of 'spectacle' deeply problematic for contemporary observers and subsequent historians. Thus, an important thread running through historical work on consumption cultures has been the morality of retail spectacle, closely linked to the morality of shopping in general, particularly when associated with the feminine consumer. Historians have often adopted a similarly moralising stance to the historical commentators they discuss, positioning spectacle as 'deception' rather than as 'cultural performance'. This approach has drawn strongly on Debord's Marxist, and therefore essentially negative, reading of 'capitalist' spectacle.<sup>20</sup> This charge can clearly be levelled at Miller et al. who write:

Vision becomes a key sense because western societies are characterised by an excess of display which has the effect of concealing the truth of the society that produces it, providing the consumer with an endless supply of images that can be understood as either detached from the real world of real things... or as simply working to efface any trace of the symbolic, condemning the consumer to a world in which everything can be seen but nothing can be understood ...<sup>21</sup>

Other historians have taken a more positive stance on the morality of shopping and desire. For Leach, department store-nurtured desires were at the very heart of the new American culture, providing a new value system: a 'consumer capitalism' to replace, or work in tandem with, established religion.<sup>22</sup> The work of Rappaport and Wilson has similarly stressed the pleasurable and empowering aspects of these desires.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Abelson, *When Ladies Go a-Thieving*; Uwe Spiekermann, 'Theft and Thieves in German Department Stores, 1895 – 1930', in Geoffrey Crossick and Serge Jaumain, (eds.) *Cathedrals of Consumption: the European Department Store*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999.

<sup>19</sup> Bowlby, *Just Looking*, 6.

<sup>20</sup> Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 12. Similarly, Leiss, Klein and Jhally note that critiques of advertising often constitute veiled criticisms of the materialism of industrial society. Leiss, Kline and Jhally, *Social Communication in Advertising*, 24.

<sup>21</sup> Miller et al., *Shopping, Place and Identity*, 3.

<sup>22</sup> Leach, *Land of Desire*.

<sup>23</sup> Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*; Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press: 1985.



Whilst a study of the 1930s West End reveals a less anxious contemporary view of the feminine consumer's vulnerability to visual stimuli, there are certainly occasional echoes of the nineteenth-century moral outrage. Store records, the professional retail press and local newspapers, reveal a continued obsession with the shoplifter and fraudulent employee, and a new concern about the emasculating effect of display/desire on male consumers. Part III also highlights a series of professional texts for retailers that actively promoted the values of responsibility and honesty in communicating with the public, reflecting the perceived need to forge a professionalised and rational image for the sector. It appears that the connection between looking, dreaming and desire, still held currency within shopping cultures. It is also apparent that the dangers of exposure to the corrupting tendencies of spectacle, such as they were, were now believed to affect both men and women, creating a less gendered discourse of display.

It is worth adding a cautionary note to this discussion of spectacle: display, decorations and pageantry did not necessarily have the dramatic effect that was claimed by their orchestrators. Indeed, Rappaport makes a convincing argument that Victorian and Edwardian women were not mesmerised by advertising rhetoric, neither was their shopping the result of being tempted beyond their endurance by baubles in window displays. Rather they were engaged pleasurably but knowingly in a game, which connected material acquisition and cultural experience with self-definition. Lomax goes further; her study of British shop windows in the inter-war period pointing to the traditional nature of display strategies, making windows unlikely to arrest the attention in the ways in which historians have suggested.<sup>24</sup> This parallels the assertion within Driver and Foxall's critique of advertising which suggests that people actually respond to the bombardment of advertisers with a relative lack of interest.<sup>25</sup> Whilst the West End was a special case within the British shopping landscape, due to its association with exceptionally fashionable, luxurious and modern shopping, these studies serve as a warning not to take retailers' and guidebooks' depictions of the spectacle of the shops at face value.

The interpretation of shopping cultures as theatre provides a useful way forward for discussing the spectacular practices of the 1930s West End. This draws on notions of performance as a

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<sup>24</sup> Susan Lomax, 'The View from the Shop: English Worlds Through the Window', paper given at the CHORD conference, University of Wolverhampton, 12-13 September 2002.

<sup>25</sup> John Driver and Gordon Foxall, *Advertising policy and practice*, London: Holt, Rinehart and Winston with the Advertising Association, 1984.



staged historically located and culturally specific practice.<sup>26</sup> In a more literal sense, Bowlby, Breward and Rappaport have all specifically explored the convergence of shopping with popular musical theatre, for example Rappaport's discussion of the successful shop girl romance, *Our Miss Gibbs* which opened at the Gaiety theatre in 1909, understood to represent Harrods department store, the show's sponsor.<sup>27</sup> Useful conclusions are drawn in these studies about the theatricality of modern shopping; especially in terms of viewing the practices of the female shopper as a performance. But the displays, decorations and pageants can also be seen as theatre, orchestrated by department store owners and designers, in which consumers were the audience as much as the participants, a view promoted by Leach and Gronberg.<sup>28</sup> When the cultures of shopping considered in Part III are interpreted as theatre rather than straightforwardly as spectacle, this foregrounds their ability to communicate and to stage particular kinds of consumption, rather than just their power to dazzle. In this part, the theatre of the shopping street is examined for what it reveals about the West End's shopping cultures. Spectacle had become a language, as well as a selling strategy.

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<sup>26</sup> The literature on performance, and its use within cultural geography is usefully discussed in Catherine Nash 'Performativity in Practice: some recent work in cultural geography', *Progress in Human Geography* 24 (4), 653-664.

<sup>27</sup> Bowlby, *Just Looking*, 65; Breward *The Hidden Consumer*, Chapter 6; Rappaport *Shopping for Pleasure*, Chapter 6.

<sup>28</sup> Leach, *Land of Desire*, 69; Gronberg, *Designs on Modernity*.



## 9.

### THE WINDOW: A PLACE OF 'INFINITE POSSIBILITIES'

In 1935, *Commercial Art and Industry* reviewed Jaeger's new Regent Street shop, 'The main front, with its great sheets of plate glass clipped into place, suggests infinite possibilities, opening up the building and inviting the customer to enter.'<sup>1</sup> The reviewer responded to the particular ordering within this new retail architecture, homing in on the prominent space of the window, and suggested that a certain 'magic' was to be found there. By the 1930s, the shop window had clearly emerged as the main locus of stores' spectacular strategies, capable of expressing a much higher degree of novelty than their more permanent architectural structure and surfaces. These displays also had a more immediate relationship with the city and its passing traffic than the stores' internal displays. Window display was an established language with which to communicate with customers, simultaneously advertising particular goods and encouraging people to enter the store environment.

Lomax has drawn attention to a fierce debate within the retail and display trades during the first quarter of the twentieth century, which created a polarisation between the traditional 'stocky' window, crowded with as many goods as possible, and the 'open' window, with 'designed' displays which selected particular goods for attention.<sup>2</sup> This debate was fuelled by anxiety about the morality of retail spectacle and its relationship with consuming desires. Traditionalists objected to the showiness and exploitative nature of modern window display,

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<sup>1</sup> *Commercial Art and Industry*, July 1935, 27.

<sup>2</sup> Lomax, 'The View from the Shop'



implying that their ‘stocky’ windows can be seen to have functioned straightforwardly as a catalogue imparting information on the range and prices of commodities to window-shoppers. However, the symbolic language of the window was by now unavoidable, and despite their protestations, owners of ‘traditional’ windows also patently communicated in way that was far from straightforward, representing values such as honesty, decency, old-fashioned shopkeeping methods. This interpretation helps to resolve the apparent inconsistency of John Spedan Lewis’s approach to design and display at Peter Jones: his commissioning of a striking Modern building with state-of-the-art shop windows at odds with his ostensible reluctance to indulge in ‘manipulative’ window displays. In the department store context, the traditional, ‘stocky’ shop window could also be read as a ‘horn of plenty’, its very fullness signifying the luxuriousness of the consumer experience, the opulence of goods, and the store’s ability to fulfil any desire.

It is this manipulative aspect of window display, its ability not only to inform, but to tempt the passer-by, that was most of interest to social commentators and subsequently to historians of shopping, who linked shop window displays with the new bourgeois consumer cultures associated with the rise of the department store, often drawing on the discussion of the ‘morality’ of spectacle, outlined in the previous chapter. Leach described window display as part of a new ‘aesthetic of longing and desire’ created by the new visual media of the 1890s, which also included electrical signs, fashion shows, advertisements and billboards.<sup>3</sup> The shop window has also become an iconic space for historians and theorists of urban modernity, and the activity of window-shopping has been identified as one of the key elements of modern shopping.<sup>4</sup> The window was also a politicised space, as shown by the window-smashing activities of the Suffragettes in London’s West End.<sup>5</sup>

This chapter revisits the shop window in 1930s London, where it still loomed large within shopping cultures. [Figure 1.1] The window had provided the visual focal point for *Vogue*’s article *A New London*, where it was used as a symbol for the modernity of the metropolis. It was also a key element in store architecture, in retail advertising strategies and in representations of shopping in media like *Vogue*’s Shop-hound columns. The chapter considers both its symbolic power and what it was used to communicate, with a case study of changes in display practices within the West End’s masculine shopping routes.

<sup>3</sup> Leach, *Land of Desire*, 9

<sup>4</sup> See for example, Bowlby, *Just Looking*; Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*, Cambridge Mass.: Mit Press, 1989.

<sup>5</sup> Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*, 215-222.



# 'THE KEY-STONE OF EFFECTIVE MERCHANDISING AND SALES PROMOTION'

One approach to window display is to discuss it straightforwardly as advertising strategy. This is a necessary and important part of the discussion, but privileges the authorial role of the store owner and window dresser, reducing the consumer to a passive audience. Leach sees the spectacle associated with consumption in inter-war America as cynically commercially directed. He writes,

Much glimmered in the twenties. Fashion spectacles glimmered in such cities as Philadelphia and Chicago. There were color and light spectacles, too, and big spectacle parades for adults and children, including extensive pre-Christmas parades. America's Mecca of colour and light, Time Square, emerged as the nation's most famous glimmering district. And behind these spectacles, as rationally managed in their way as the contemporary promotional strategies, was what Fitzgerald said in *The Great Gatsby* could be heard in the voice of beautiful Daisy Buchanan: 'Her voice was full of money.'<sup>6</sup>

There is good reason to ascribe to an account of window display as advertising. During the first thirty years of the twentieth century, British display had followed innovations taking place in Europe and the United States. Displays became increasingly sophisticated, 'designed' and symbolic during these years, drawing on a more complex understanding of advertising, consumer psychology, and the manipulative potential of window displays. It had in effect become an established, and pivotal, component of a store's advertising strategy. As authors such as Leiss, Klein and Jhally have pointed out, this was a time when advertising was assuming a significant role within society, both in terms of encouraging the centrality of consumption in modern culture, and in creating a language of consumption, desire and commodity to mediate between commerce and the consumer.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, advertising was believed to be an essential tool for handling the specific retail conditions of the 1930s. For example, *Commercial Art* suggested that advertising could stimulate consumption and so help to overcome the current economic depression.<sup>8</sup> This journal was critical of the general quality and sophistication of retail's graphic advertising,<sup>9</sup> However, rather than indicating retailers' lack of belief in advertising, this reflected the fact that display often competed successfully with newspaper advertising for a share of publicity budgets. Companies like John Lewis and Marks and Spencer even refrained from regular newspaper advertising altogether, whilst

<sup>6</sup> Leach, *Land of Desire*, 325. The quotation is from F.Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, New York, 1925, 120.

<sup>7</sup> Leiss, Kline and Jhally, *Social Communication in Advertising*.

<sup>8</sup> *Commercial Art* October 1930, 139.

<sup>9</sup> See for example *Commercial Art*, April 1931, 168.



devoting significant attention to their windows. As a store director told *Store* journal 'Retail advertising begins in the window'.<sup>10</sup>

Psychology was a key word for 1930s retailers. The professional retailing press reveals a high level of awareness of consumer psychology in its discussion of advertising and display, reflecting international trends.<sup>11</sup> *Store Annual's* published bibliography included a significant number of texts on the psychology of advertising for reader reference.<sup>12</sup> *Store* frequently debated the role of persuasion and subconscious manipulation, whilst *Commercial Art and Industry* published articles on the psychology of window display.<sup>13</sup> Whilst Lomax argues that understandings of consumer psychology were relatively limited at this time, as a lack of any real consumer research meant that at best only oblique connections could be made between genres of display and categories of consumer,<sup>14</sup> it is still very significant for this study that display was being articulated with this psychological language.

This new awareness was connected to an increasing professionalisation of the field of window display.<sup>15</sup> The larger stores had substantial dedicated display departments that employed high profile professionals, such as Bauhaus-émigré Moholy Nagy at Simpsons. It was also a period that witnessed the establishment of The National Display Association and the commencement of dedicated display classes at Westminster School of Art.<sup>16</sup> There was a flood of instruction manuals by experts such as A. Edward Hammond, which dealt at length with shopfronts, materials, window construction, display fittings and fixtures, display design, lighting, ticketing and so on, highlighting the skills and knowledge required by the display man (it was still a strongly gendered profession at this time, as Gronberg points out).<sup>17</sup> Throughout the period, window display also remained a frequent subject for the professional journals serving the retail trade, such as *Store*, *Commercial Art and Industry* and *Drapers Record*. These journals reported comprehensively on the latest fittings and techniques, published photographs of good practice from shopping streets, and ran window display competitions. They regularly expressed concerns about the need to catch up with North American and European techniques,

<sup>10</sup> *Store* May 1937, 228.

<sup>11</sup> Ward describes the 'psychotechnical experiments' carried out in 1920s Germany, which betrayed a high awareness of the consumer's relationship with window displays. Ward, *Weimar Surfaces*, 215-220.

<sup>12</sup> *Store Annual*, 1939, 239 – 246.

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, *Commercial Art and Industry*, February 1934, 37.

<sup>14</sup> Lomax, 'The View from the Shop.'

<sup>15</sup> This was noted in James L. Courtney, *Practical Aspects of Advertising*, London: Faber and Faber, 1939, 105; A. Edward Hammond, *Multiple Shop Organisation*, London: Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons, 1930, 104.

<sup>16</sup> These classes were publicised in *Commercial Art and Industry*, August 1935, 61.

<sup>17</sup> In 1939, *Store Annual* listed thirty seven different texts on the subject of window display. *Store Annual*, 1939, 239 - 246. A typical example was: A. Edward Hammond (ed.), *Men's Wear Display: A Practical Work on Window Showmanship and Interior Planning and Equipment*, London: Caxton c.1930.



revealing a perception of window display as an index to the modernity of retail methods.<sup>18</sup> This focus on display within retail practice led architectural commentator A. Trystan Edwards to complain, 'The museum atmosphere is becoming far too common in some of our great stores'.<sup>19</sup>

Retailers usually discussed their use of display in pragmatic terms rather than invoking a language of spectacle, desire and dreams, seeking to distance themselves from charges of dishonesty and manipulation that were seen as damaging the profession.<sup>20</sup> The National Display Association positioned itself precisely in this way, stating: 'Display is today, more than ever before, the key-stone of effective merchandising and sales promotion'.<sup>21</sup> There was a strong belief that window display translated directly into sales, whether or not the mechanisms for this happening were fully understood. However, an integral part of the professionalisation of window display had been its redefinition as a creative as well as a commercial practice, placing it alongside graphic design and architecture in a store's portfolio of design. With the increasing employment of professional, specialised window designers, displays increasingly reflected movements in art and design which would communicate abstract values and encourage the window to operate on a symbolic level.

#### 'THAT INTIMATE TOUCH BETWEEN ... GOODS AND THE PUBLIC'

Unlike most other forms of store publicity, window display was closely connected with the shopping street. Although some store archives and professional texts contain records of these transient displays, they were usually photographed in isolation, removed from the context of the street, the shop and the consumer, rather preserved as a record of collections and of the window dresser's skill. [Figures 9.1 and 9.2] A series of photographs from the late twenties in the Liberty Archive provide a rare glimpse of the way shop window display formed a close connection between the store and the consumer, siting the theatre of consumption in the West End street. [Figure 9.3] Through the increasingly Modern, pared down treatment of window construction, displayed goods were brought tantalisingly close to the person in the street, a connection evoked by a photograph in *The Architectural Review* of lingerie silk lapping

<sup>18</sup> See for example the discussion of Viennese windows in *Commercial Art* January 1932, 29-31; 'Impressive Czech Windows', *Store*, December 1936, 74-5; 'New York's Dernier Cri', *Store*, July 1937, 297.

<sup>19</sup> A Trystan Edwards, *The Architecture of Shops*, London: Chapman and Hall, 1933, 46.

<sup>20</sup> This view is expressed in Frank Chitham and S.A. Williams, *Principles of Store Practice*, London: Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons, 1932, 106.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in *Store*, August 1937, 335.



against the glass at H. Weiss in Golders Green, designed by Erno Goldfinger, in c.1936.<sup>22</sup>

The power of this theatre is reflected in the crowds and disruption caused by window displays. *Commercial Art* reported how novel displays at the Galleries Lafayette in Paris caused such a commotion in the street that they required a commissionaire to shepherd the queues past.<sup>23</sup> The string of shop windows flanking the West End's pavements can be seen as the most communicative component of retail buildings, level with the eye of the passer-by. The *Evening Standard*'s 'woman correspondent' reviewed New York's shopping districts in 1930. After discussing the popular interest in the tower-filled skyline of New York, she admitted, 'but I am much more fascinated with the ground floor of New York. The joyous things in the shop windows make me stand and gape and forget all about craning my neck to look up at the Lincoln or Mr Woolworth's effort.'<sup>24</sup> This hierarchy of visibility provides a new take on how retail architecture was 'read' or 'consumed'.

[Figure 9.4] The window's relative architectural prominence was heightened during the thirties. This was assisted by the freeing of building regulations in 1934 regarding the use of fixed canopies above the shop window, shielding the eye from the expanse of building above, and from the glare of the sun. *Vogue* commented on the canopy at Peter Jones, 'On the spacious covered pavement you can gaze dreamily in at the windows, no matter what the weather.'<sup>25</sup> A new approach to the design of the glazing also served to increase the impact of this element of the building: the convention of shop windows divided regularly by substantial but structurally unnecessary piers, as seen in Regent Street, was replaced by uninterrupted bands of glazing, seen for example at Peter Jones and Simpsons. This new aesthetic of the glazed horizontal clearly spoke of the Modern, as *Building* reported, 'This method, indeed, stamps any new building with the authentic modern touch.'<sup>26</sup> But John Spedan Lewis's liking for it was articulated in more pragmatic terms, 'People, who go to Regent Street in order to examine the contents of shop windows, waste their journey to a considerable extent because ... they find, instead of shop-windows, enormous piers of sham masonry ...'.<sup>27</sup> In contrast, he described his own proposed window for Peter Jones to the partners: 'an absolutely continuous corridor right round the whole site ... It is completely unbroken by any cross-division or

<sup>22</sup> *Architectural Review*, August 1936, 85.

<sup>23</sup> *Commercial Art* February 1930, 41.

<sup>24</sup> *Evening Standard*, 7 January 1930, 18.

<sup>25</sup> 'A New London', *Vogue*, 5 August 1936, 9.

<sup>26</sup> *Building*, March 1936.

<sup>27</sup> *Gazette of the John Lewis Partnership*, 13 April, 1935, 229.



columns of any kind.’<sup>28</sup> *Drapers’ Record* reported that D. H. Evans had nearly a quarter of a mile of canopied windows in Oxford Street, Cavendish Street and Henrietta Street.<sup>29</sup> These developments contributed to the impression of the West End’s streets as what Leach has termed a ‘landscape of glass’.<sup>30</sup>

The shop window display can also be understood as inhabiting the intermediary space between inside and outside: it was here that the ‘infinite possibilities’ of the modern shop lay. It was potentially a significant place for Modernist discourse, as historians have shown how this relationship between the interior and exterior, between the private and the public, was reconfigured in the Modern building.<sup>31</sup> The existence of the substantially glazed ground floor contributed to a blurring of boundaries between the shop and the street, between the theatre of shopping and the audience, making goods appear at once accessible and inaccessible. Shop windows were of course flanked, and often addressed, the entrance, where internal and external shopping routes flowed into each other. In this respect, boundaries between store and street were further collapsed in the inter-war years by the vogue for recessed entrances and ‘island windows’. *The Builder* noted how the exaggerated recess in effect constructed arcades:

The new arcading of the ‘Galleries Lafayette’ in Regent Street is arranged with a series of criss-cross pathways leaving diamond and triangle-shaped spaces between. ... The intricacy of its shapes attracts one’s curiosity and the arrangement of its pathways invites one to meander from the pavement into its alley-ways ...<sup>32</sup>

[Figure 9.5 and 4.23] These recessed entrances also had the function of dramatically increasing the surface area of the glazed interface between the shop and street. The frequently considerable proportion of the ground floor plan devoted to window display was exemplified in Joseph Emberton’s designs for Style and Mantle and His Master’s Voice. The sacrifice of extremely valuable Oxford Street land for display and window-shopping reflects the importance of this part of the building.<sup>33</sup> The professional journals expressed a good deal of interest in the phenomenon of the arcaded window, tracking its international progress. *Commercial Art* reported an example in the Champs Elysées where this blurring of boundaries was taken to its limits. Here, it reported, a shop literally metamorphosed at night and on

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 227.

<sup>29</sup> *Drapers’ Record*, February 27, 1937, 6.

<sup>30</sup> Leach, *Land of Desire*, 55.

<sup>31</sup> See for example: Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity*; Wigley, *White Walls, Designer Dresses*.

<sup>32</sup> F. E. Bennett A.R.I.B.A. ‘The Shop’, *The Builder*, 1 February 1929, 240.

<sup>33</sup> *Architect and Building News*, 22 August 1930, 243; Master’s Voice, Oxford Street, illustrated in the *Architectural Review*, July 1939, 7.



Sundays into a gallery within the street: display windows were drawn back on tracks and reconfigured, carpets were rolled back to reveal a tiled floor.<sup>34</sup> This extreme manipulation of the distinction between the shop and the street, between display and exhibition, highlights the way stores sought to transform idle urban promenading into window-shopping.

However, as the decade wore on, this 'arcaded' approach to the window became less popular, superseded by a new window design which diminished the visibility of the glass boundary still further. [Figure 9.6] By the mid thirties, glass with a single or double-curved section was seen as constituting the future of shop windows, satirised in *The Outfitter* in 1936. Although in practice such windows were the exception rather than the rule, they were used at several prominent West End locations: Simpsons, Emberton's 1936 redesign of HMV in Oxford Street, and Heals in Tottenham Court Road. John Spedan Lewis also planned to reconsider installing them at Peter Jones once glass technology had developed sufficiently to overcoming the teething problems of the sort experienced at Simpsons. [Figure 9.7] The product was marketed to retailers as 'invisible glass', due to its non-reflective properties that would 'assist that intimate touch between their goods and the public.'<sup>35</sup> The review of Simpsons in *Industrial Arts* was clearly aware of the significance of this development, 'The removal of any sense of barrier between the buyer and the goods is simply another aspect of the new attitude towards buying and selling today.'<sup>36</sup> Reflections were further diminished by the aforementioned new canopies that shaded the window from sunlight, constituting a more effective, permanent, and architectural version of the canvas retractable sun awnings that had long been a feature of shopping streets.

The movement towards this 'disappearing' of the glass boundary, can lead to an interpretation of window displays which stresses the proximity and availability of the commodities displayed, in line with accounts of the democratisation of consumption cultures of the period. Another interpretation is to stress how the disappearance facilitated the immediacy of the theatre. The presence of mannequins in shop windows, positioned by display directors and viewed beyond the glass, has invited historians such as Schneider and Gronberg to draw on the analogy of theatre in their discussion of windows and mannequins.<sup>37</sup> Whilst Gronberg stresses the controlling power of the display designer in this theatre, the invisibility of the glass

<sup>34</sup> *Commercial Art*, May 1931, 224-5

<sup>35</sup> Advertisement for E. Pollard and Co., *Store*, July 1937, 4.

<sup>36</sup> *Industrial Arts*, Summer 1936, 94.

<sup>37</sup> Gronberg, *Designs on Modernity*; Sara K. Schneider, *Vital Mummies: Performance Design for the Show-Window Mannequin*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995.



boundary can be seen to diminish the control of this figure over the tableau, obscuring the definition of the 'stage' and creating confusion in the distinction between actor and audience.

An important element in the discussion of window display has been about the display figure as a 'mirror', representing the consumer's desired new self. The invisible boundary certainly provided the potential for a 'mirror image', uninterrupted by reflections of buildings across the street, the traffic, the window-shopper themselves. [Figure 9.8] This understanding of the window-shopper/mannequin relationship is supported by the availability of increasingly realistic mannequins, such as those manufactured by Kathe Kruse. The confusion between reality and representation is highlighted in *Store's* commentary on these new mannequins, 'How many real people here? Actually the answer is "None." Both customer and assistant are Kathe Kruse models, posed with lifelike detail. The contrast with the conventional figure in the centre is striking.'<sup>38</sup>

[Figure 4.32] It is worth revisiting Gaunt's Wardour Street prostitutes, encountered in Part I. They stand on a street corner beside the window of a lingerie shop, and relate in a direct way to the window display, 'A sullen group worthy of Carpaccio stands by a draper's window in which waxen statuary is gracefully poised beaming with an eternal graciousness and wide unchanging eyes at the passers-by, gesticulating with cereous fingers that taper to a fine point.'<sup>39</sup> The illustration itself provides a further commentary on viewing and identity through the relationship between the four female figures: the scantily clad dancing mannequin displayed in the window looked out at the scene in the street, one prostitute gazed at her, the second looked at the third prostitute, who in turn turned her head to meet the reader's gaze, enticing them to consume the scene. This kind of model has informed several historians and theorists in their view of the gendered power dynamic between male window designer, female mannequin and male or female viewer. In Gronberg and Reekie's assessment, the feminine consumer is sexualised and objectified through the practice of window-shopping, Reekie claiming, 'The exhibitionist/retailer... attempted to provoke awe and submission in the women to whom he exposed his goods.'<sup>40</sup> Bowlby has provided a more positive and also more complex commentary on the way the new, intimate kind of display acted as mirror and barrier, contributing to new ways of understanding the consumer self,

<sup>38</sup> 'Kathe Kruse Dramatises Display,' *Store*, February 1937, 140.

<sup>39</sup> William Gaunt, *London Promenade*, London: The Studio, 1930, 20.

<sup>40</sup> Reekie, *Temptations*, 99; Gronberg, *Designs on Modernity*.



Consumer culture transforms the narcissistic mirror into a shop window, the glass which reflects an idealised image of the woman (or man) who stands before it, in the form of the model she could buy or become. Through the glass, the woman sees what she wants and what she wants to be. As both barrier and transparent substance, representing freedom of view joined to suspension of access, the shop window figures an ambivalent, powerful union of distance and desire. Like Narcissus's reflection, the model in the window is something both real and other. It offers something more in the form of another, altered self, and one potentially obtainable via the payment of a stipulated price.

Bowlby also allows for the manipulative potential of the window, inducing the need to repetitively purchase,

But it also, by the same token, constitutes the looker as lacking, as being without “what it takes”. Next year, or next door, at the superior establishment, the fashion will be different: the longing and lacking of the consumer are limitless, producing an insatiable interplay between deprivation and desire, between what the woman is (not) and what she might look like.<sup>41</sup>

However, not all 1930s mannequins were life-like. The variety of representational possibilities suggested a more complex bond with the window-shopper than is accounted for by the ‘mirror’ or ‘theatre’ models, allowing for the mannequin to signal both a fragmented self, and the dissolving of distinctions between the real and unreal. The headless mannequin had long been a staple of the window, and Bowlby interprets Zola’s nineteenth-century Parisian versions as representing the ‘fragmentation and objectification of women identified and identifying with dressed up bodies and body parts’<sup>42</sup> Schneider pushes this argument further into the territory of post-modern disintegration:

Although these body fragments often are simply visually arresting ways of referring to whole selves, they may also suggest that the splinters, shards, and traces of bodies in the window displays are *all there is*, even in the world beyond the window frame, that they do not refer to a larger self but are themselves a self-sufficient self that we fear to acknowledge. Such fragmentation suggests that human agency ... is neither as dignified nor as privileged as we have cared to think. We come to doubt both the psychologized interior and the whole, undamaged exterior of a person, even as we depend on them to make sense of the world, for the partial exterior may be a self, as may the empty interior.<sup>43</sup>

This thesis suggests that there are, however, more useful frameworks for interpreting the window displays of the 1930s West End. [Figure 9.9] The ghostly ‘transparent’ and ‘invisible’

<sup>41</sup> Bowlby, *Just Looking*, 34.

<sup>42</sup> Bowlby, *Just Looking*, 73

<sup>43</sup> Schneider, *Vital Mummies*, 4.



mannequins in Harrods windows in 1938 spoke more clearly of the creation of an abstract, dreamlike unreal space, a place of ‘infinite possibilities’ and the desired transformation of the self, relating to broader patterns within the spectacular practices of shops. The display humorously, and knowingly, played on the slippage between presence and absence.<sup>44</sup> These mannequins on one hand evaded the gaze of the shopper, whilst on the other invited her to substitute her own face. They also renegotiated the balance between body and clothes within display, suggesting that the consumer was constructed *through* their clothes, an important theme within constructions of 1930s consumer identities which is developed within Part IV.

Most importantly, this chapter suggests that in the context of the 1930s West End, the ‘fragmented’ mannequins cannot be separated from a discussion of the entry of Modernism and Surrealism into the window. Within this artistic register, windows might be filled with disembodied hands, clothing on an enormous scale, or Modern geometric arrangements of garments, divorced entirely from the convention of a mannequin. The clearest message was about the *modernity* of consumer cultures. Schneider notes that several Surrealists worked as display artists, citing the important ‘Narcissus White’ window at Bonwit Teller in New York by Salvador Dali of 1939.<sup>45</sup> She also draws links between this and the key role of the mannequin within their creative work. [Figure 9.10] The Parisian company Siegel’s mannequins were increasingly Modern in design, and were featured in an article entitled ‘Exit Wax’ in *Commercial Art*.<sup>46</sup> An interesting example, a construction of geometric shapes, was captioned ‘synthesis of modern womanhood’. One function of these Surreal and Modern mannequins was to point to the abstraction and the obscuring of the consumer in the window, contributing to the ‘unreal’ atmosphere which fed into the spectacle-induced desiring and dreaming discussed in Part III.

According to Gronberg, retail and display professionals used a Modern visual vocabulary to ‘divert desire from [the mannequin] to the commodity’, particularly through the erasure of the female face in stylised inter-war mannequins.<sup>47</sup> This research, however, suggests that the stylisation, Modernism and Surrealism of these mannequins served primarily to communicate the modernity of the store more straightforwardly through association with contemporary avant-garde art movements, in a similar fashion to the stores’ use of Modern architecture outlined in Part II. Associations with these movements became particularly worthwhile

<sup>44</sup> *Art and Industry*, March 1938, 104.

<sup>45</sup> Schneider, *Vital Mummies*, Chapter 1.

<sup>46</sup> *Commercial Art*, February 1931, 54-58.

<sup>47</sup> Gronberg, *Designs on Modernity*, 82.



following their raised profile during events such as the Surrealism exhibition at the New Burlington Galleries of 1936. *Commercial Art*'s commentary on the latest mannequins in 1931 certainly seemed to betray such an attitude: 'The new liberty of expression has evidently invaded the shop-window, and the unusual effects of silhouettes in wire, robot-like figures and cut-outs painted in a modernistic manner are among "the latest things from Paris."' <sup>48</sup>

Modernity, desire and the self, then, collided in the figure of the 1930s mannequin. These developments in display equipment, combined with the newly transparent windows, certainly made the relationship between consumer and shopping theatre, through the medium of the shop window, a charged one. This suggests that the claims of retailers that they used window display as a straightforward merchandising exercise should be treated with caution. By positioning commodities, usually clothing or accessories, on this particular West End stage, the displayed goods became actors in the staging of consumption.<sup>49</sup> This was understood by the architect J.C. Moreux, writing in *Commercial Art*: 'The more effectively things in a shop are displayed the better they will capture attention, and this brings us to the true definition of the shop. From being merely the place where the shopkeeper sells his wares it has become the stage on which he presents them in as favourable a light as possible.'<sup>50</sup> Ward has drawn a similar analogy with cinema, pointing to a shared audience 'captivated by the image behind the transparent pane.'<sup>51</sup>

Whether the role ascribed to the audience is a passive or active one, the display of fashionable clothing and goods in shop windows was essentially a performance of fashion in the West End street. Like the women's magazine, the advertisement and the fashion show, the shop window was a fluid space that was continually transformed, in tune with ephemeral fashion cultures and the fleeting modern city. As Ward writes of Weimar windows: 'that which was on display was temporary; its short life span prodded the art of window display to be more daring, exaggerated, and self-prostituting, in order to cause a disruption in potential consumers' fields of vision.'<sup>52</sup> The John Lewis archives record the regular re-allotment of space within each of the windows of its Oxford Street store to different departments week by week: 'No.1 - 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> weeks – Cotton Dress Materials. 2<sup>nd</sup> week – Woollen Dress Materials. No.2 – 1<sup>st</sup>

<sup>48</sup> *Commercial Art*, February 1931, 41.

<sup>49</sup> Bowlby suggests that the window transformed the meaning of commodities within modern consumer cultures, 'from now on, it is not so much the object in itself - what function it serves - which matters, as its novelty or attractiveness, how it stands out from other objects for sale. The commodity is a sign whose value is derived from its monetary price relative to other commodities, and not from any inherent properties of usefulness or necessity.' Bowlby, *Just Looking*, 2

<sup>50</sup> Architect J. C. Moreux, 'Shop Architecture as an aid to selling', *Commercial Art*, November 1930, 188.

<sup>51</sup> Ward, *Weimar Surfaces*, 221.

<sup>52</sup> Ward, *Weimar Surfaces*, 216.



week Furnishing Fabrics. 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> weeks – Silk Department...'<sup>53</sup> It was essential that this space did not remain static.

Ultimately, the staging of consumption through window display spoke volumes about place, networks and the West End's streets. Windows here were expected to be more lavish, more novel, more arresting than elsewhere in the country, positioned within an international network of capitals from whom the window dressers took their references. Consideration of window display contributes to the discussion of the differentiation of the West End's shopping routes set out in Chapter 4, showing how display was an important way in which the identities of individual shops and routes were marked, and transformed. Within the feminine shopping routes, windows were a means of distinguishing lower-middle-class department stores, multiples and outfitters on Oxford Street, from the more luxurious stores on Regent Street and Piccadilly, and from the exclusive boutiques on Bond Street. This was noted by contemporary guidebooks: 'In Bond Street are exclusive shops for the wealthy, unostentatious in outward appearance, their fine wares being kept inside. On the other hand, in Oxford Street the large establishments flourish their goods in the windows.'<sup>54</sup> The next section will develop this idea, considering how approaches to display helped to distinguish the identities of different masculine shopping routes.

‘SHOPKEEPERS, EVIDENTLY, DO NOT SHARE THAT MASCULINE THEORY THAT  
A MAN ... IS IMMUNE FROM DISPLAY ...’

This thesis is most interested in the way window display promoted modern consumption culture in the West End by aligning itself with the Modern. The following case study of the transformation of window display within masculine shopping routes highlights the way the window was at the nexus of debates on modern masculinity, class, consumption and the Modern, and provided a mechanism for the realignment of consumer identities and the reconfiguration of shopping routes, with repercussions beyond the realm of masculine consumption.

[Figure 9.11] Leading the field in display terms were the new man's shops like Simpsons and Austin Reed. Simpsons' architect, Joseph Emberton, clearly understood the value of the shop

<sup>53</sup> *Gazette of the John Lewis Partnership*, 8 November 1930, 761.

<sup>54</sup> *London: The World's Largest City*, Edinburgh: A. Walker and Son, 1938, 7



window. He had written in 1932, ‘display windows constitute the most direct means of advertising.’<sup>55</sup> Joseph Emberton and Alexander Simpson were both already adept at using the visual vocabulary of the world of exhibitions, fairs and display before their collaboration on Simpsons. One obituary of Simpson recorded, ‘At the British Industries Fair in 1934 Mr Alexander Simpson startled the menswear trade with his magnificent show of Simpson clothes. His ideas for exhibiting men's clothes were quite different to those of anyone else. He engaged a number of male models to wear Simpson clothes, and these men stood about the stands with a background of the actual setting the clothes should be worn in.’<sup>56</sup> As previously noted, Emberton had designed the Olympia exhibition complex, numerous display stands and much of Blackpool pleasure beach. He had learned about attention-grabbing architecture, integral dramatic lighting and signage: designing for leisure, pleasure and spectacle.

[Figure 7.2] This collaboration had the potential to transform the communication of menswear windows, injecting them with a striking modernity that paralleled the architecture of the store. As discussed in Part II, glass, and especially the window, was a key element of the inter-war Modernist architectural composition: it provided new approaches to the design of façades, and opened up possibilities for new kinds of window design. As we have seen, glass and the window were certainly prominent in the architectural treatment of Simpsons and Peter Jones. [Figure 9.12] Architects increasingly focused their creative energies on the *displays*, as well as the structure, of the shop window. In 1936 *Architectural Design and Construction* published architect Oliver Hill’s redesign of a New Bond Street window, tellingly captioned: ‘a “designed” window display.’<sup>57</sup> As discussed in Part II, Emberton made his advanced non-reflective display window a focal point of the Modern shop he designed for Simpsons. But this space was conceived with its displays in mind, Emberton boasting to his client, ‘I am hoping to put up a proposal as yet undreamed of by a display man.’<sup>58</sup>

The appointed display man, Moholy-Nagy, was well able to rise to the challenge. He was also expensive, indicating the store owner’s prioritisation of expertly designed display within this enterprise.<sup>59</sup> He specified a range of specially imported simple modern display fittings,<sup>60</sup> of a

<sup>55</sup> Joseph Emberton, ‘Modern Store Design’, *Specification*, No.34, 1932, 21.

<sup>56</sup> Obituary, *Man and His Clothes*, June 1937.

<sup>57</sup> ‘A “designed” Window Display in New Bond Street, W1’, *Architectural Design and Construction*, July 1936, 306.

<sup>58</sup> Letter from Joseph Emberton to Alexander Simpson 10 April 1935, Simpsons Archive.

<sup>59</sup> This expense and Moholy Nagy’s demands for facilities in the new building were laid out in a letters from Alexander Simpson to Joseph Emberton, dated 28 January 1936 and 4 February 1936, Simpsons Archive.

<sup>60</sup> Letter from Lazlo Moholy Nagy to Alexander Simpson, c.11 February 1936, Simpsons Archive.



type that was increasingly *de rigueur* in the professional retailing press.<sup>61</sup> Window backs and bases were constructed in a limited palette of natural wood and ivory and black cellulose.<sup>62</sup> The muddle of advertising copy was avoided by confining text to a discreet glass notice board. In the early years of the store mannequins were not used, despite the range of masculine models on the market. [Figure 9.13] Carefully controlled windows, featuring geometric and abstract displays, and avoiding visual clutter, were the store's signature. Mr Simpson claimed this stemmed from a pragmatic impulse, 'I am anxious to ... concentrate all the attention on the coat and the minimum attention on any part of the dummy.'<sup>63</sup> However, the symbolic content of these windows undercut these words.

[Figure 9.14] In the window of the new man's shop, Modern art and modern psychology came together. They served not only to publicise individual garments, but to sell the image of the store, which as has been discussed, was central to the Simpsons project. A Harrods director wrote in 1932: 'Windows are no longer primarily regarded as a medium for selling goods. Their main function today is to advertise the store and attract the public.'<sup>64</sup> This resonates powerfully with Simpsons, where the Modern arrangements and sparseness of exhibits communicated modernity. As we have seen, this symbolic register was well established: West End windows had long been conveying qualities such as 'luxury' and 'modernity'. What was new in the inter-war years was the use of Modernism in display, and the belief in the power of the shop window to entice *male* consumers, as captured in a 1936 photograph taken in front of Austin Reed's Regent Street shop.<sup>65</sup>

The geographies of masculine window display become an extremely important part of this story: the positioning of Simpsons within the web of West End streets was intricately related to the display choices made and their effect. On the traditional route of elite masculine consumption, businesses had long traded on their static and exclusive nature: distancing themselves from the ephemeral, feminine fashion system performed in Oxford Street, Regent Street and Bond Street, refusing to engage with the changes taking place within British gender and class definitions. Their version of West End masculine consumption was heavily promoted by the British clothing industry, especially in overseas marketing, capitalising on foreigners' conceptions of the West End discussed in Chapter 3. The association between

<sup>61</sup> See for example the article on tubular chrome fittings in *Commercial Art and Industry*, February 1934, 65- 69.

<sup>62</sup> Discussed in correspondence between Alexander Simpson and Joseph Emberton in the early months of 1936, Simpsons Archive.

<sup>63</sup> Letter from Alexander Simpson to Joseph Emberton, 15 February 1936, Simpsons Archive.

<sup>64</sup> Frank Chitham and S. A. Williams, *Principles of Store Practice*, London: Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons, 1932, 112.

<sup>65</sup> Austin Reed window, Oxford Street, *Architectural Design and Construction*, April 1936, 203.



traditional styles of garments, production and retail methods, and a rather reticent attitude towards window display were integral to this identity.

Breward has pointed out the strategic use of display techniques within various sectors of the late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century menswear trade, a practice previously obscured by historians' focus on the femininised display cultures of the department store.<sup>66</sup> However, the evidence of the 1930s West End suggests that retail establishments' use of window display had hitherto remained largely divided along gender and class lines, with attitudes to the spectacular actually still deeply ambivalent within the elite menswear sector.

The shirtmakers and outfitters on Jermyn Street and in the Burlington Arcade *did* display their goods in the windows, but their techniques had changed little from those described by Breward, so the windows conveyed an overall impression of tradition. Savile Row tailors, on the other hand, made much of their rejection of window display.<sup>67</sup> In 1946, the British Overseas Press Department promoted trade with the following press release,

Savile Row... is the street of London's tailors. These men are skilled craftsmen, many belonging to families who for generations have followed the business of making good clothes. All over the world the Savile Row suit is the criterion in cut, workmanship and quality of cloth ... It is a quiet street of residential appearance... holding aloof from the modern art of window dressing.<sup>68</sup>

This absence of display reflected differentiation within the menswear trade. It also signalled tailors' concerns that the traditional 'stocky' window of the sort used by Jermyn Street's outfitters was becoming associated with the unfashionable, the lower-class and the provincial, from which Savile Row tailors wished to distance themselves.<sup>69</sup> Equally repugnant to them were the professional display methods seen in the West End's feminine shopping routes: both the spectacular tableaux and the new modern method of strikingly sparse display, which were seen to operate on a symbolic rather than informative level. These methods were associated with the stylistic 'tackiness' and the ephemerality of feminine fashion. However, the absent displays of Savile Row were equally symbolic, marking out a traditional, exclusive territory where customers required detailed knowledge in order to shop.

<sup>66</sup> Breward, *The Hidden Consumer*, Chapter 4.

<sup>67</sup> Breward noted that this attitude was characteristic of the high-class Victorian and Edwardian tailors, notwithstanding the exception of the forward-looking firm, Henry Poole and Co. of Savile Row. Breward *The Hidden Consumer*, 106.

<sup>68</sup> City of Westminster Archive Centre, 11052

<sup>69</sup> The class-inflected nature of display cultures is noted in James L. Courtney, *Practical Aspects of Advertising*, London: Faber and Faber, 1939, 109.



However, the arrival of a new kind of man's shop in the West End, discussed in the previous chapters, inaugurated a very different approach to masculine display, and upset the delicate existing class and trade distinctions. [Figure 9.15] As discussed in Parts I and II, the primary display windows at Simpsons addressed Piccadilly, linking with feminine department store spectacle, but the existence of the Jermyn Street entrance flanked by further display windows allowed these display cultures to spill out onto this traditional masculine route.

'Open', Modernist displays aligned the new shop with the shopping cultures of the feminine shopping routes and with a modern rather than traditional masculine fashionability. This new emphasis on display within men's retailing caused a considerable stir. However, this thesis argues that the methods, and the store, were ultimately accepted because the displays communicated a closer affinity with the elite cultures of Jermyn Street and Savile Row businesses than with the vulgarity of East Oxford Street's cheaper outfitters and multiple tailors. They conveyed a 'masculine', controlled modernity rather than a 'feminine' excess. It is significant that Joseph Emberton understood well the class-inflected nature of window displays. He expounded in 1930, 'The people who are favourably impressed by crowded windows are steadily decreasing in number, while the more discriminating buyers are on the increase. Discerning buyers need only to be interested in an appearance of quality. It is sufficient to show one item attractively, and they will go inside in order to make a choice.'<sup>70</sup> This was a difficult balance to get right, and *Art and Industry*'s reviewer had doubts about Simpsons' displays in these terms: 'There is a temperance and dignity in Austin Reed windows lacking here. I feel that Simpson as a man's store should take a leaf out of the Savile Row tailor's books where quality is always at one with dignity, as far as display is concerned.'<sup>71</sup>

Simpsons' identity depended on a contrast being drawn between its own modernity and the old-fashioned nature of its back-door neighbours, however this relationship had to be carefully managed due to the centrality of 'tradition' within men's elite fashionability. Simpsons' neighbours were simultaneously renegotiating their relationship with the new arrival, and were also beginning to respond to new approaches to display. Early twentieth-century display instruction manuals for the menswear retail trade had not ventured much beyond the recommendation of informative, busy displays for outfitters and complex arrangements of

<sup>70</sup> Quoted in A. Edward Hammond, 'Multiples and Amenities', *Commercial Art*, February 1930, p.60

<sup>71</sup> 'Simpson: Display lessons from a New Store', *Art and Industry*, July 1936, 18-23.



draped fabrics for tailors. For example, the foreword of a typical advice manual of 1910 stated its limited purpose: 'The object of the authors ... is to endeavour to help the assistant, shopmen and all those who, whilst possessing the desire, have unfortunately not had the opportunity of learning the secret of arranging folds, pleats etc.'<sup>72</sup> [Figure 9.16] 1930s guides such as *Window Display for Outfitters and Tailors* perpetuated these traditional draping display techniques. However, the window dresser was simultaneously being advised by the expert A. Edward Hammond that although he might have a large repertoire of drapes, he should confine himself to only two or three.<sup>73</sup> [Figure 9.17] Furthermore, simple, 'modern' and 'open' display methods were recommended for the display of garments, and it was discovered that even cloth could be displayed in a more 'modern' manner.

[Figure 9.18] The transformation of one particular firm during this period, Messrs Hawkes and Co. of Savile Row, was used to epitomise the new approach to window display by several of the key professional texts. A. Edward Hammond described the 'old-established firm of military and civil tailors in Savile Row, who have replaced a dull-looking exterior, typical of those favoured by high-class tailors up to comparatively recent years, with an essentially modern shopfront having three capacious windows for display.'<sup>74</sup> Bridgeland and Alcock's review of the makeover suggested that to have any sort of window display at all in this location was seen as highly significant,

Hawkes and Co, the famous military tailors of 1 Savile Row, have removed their wire-blind and let light into the establishment. Such a move in such a street is by way of being a revolution ... The wire blind has retained a sense of aloofness from the market place and the traffic of merchandise. It has suggested that the craft of tailoring is on a par with the learned professions. Ruthlessly to strip the symbol of pride off and expose cloth on stands!<sup>75</sup>

This thesis argues that this 'revolution' was not caused directly by the influence of the big department stores, but by the new type of 'man's shop', modern in architecture, retail methods and garment production, providing serious competition for the more traditional businesses. Bridgeland and Alcock assessed the pressure on Savile Row: '... It is safe to wager that from one end of "the row" to the other every house has suffered and is suffering from ready-to-wear

<sup>72</sup> Allen, Newton and Vincent, *Window Dressing for Tailors, Drapers, Outfitters, etc.* London: John Williamson Co. c.1910's.

<sup>73</sup> A. Edward Hammond (ed.), *Men's Wear Display: A Practical Work on Window Showmanship and Interior Planning and Equipment*, London: Caxton c.1930, 186

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 27 - 29

<sup>75</sup> Bridgeland and Alcock, *Window dressing for tailors outfitters etc.*, c.1930, 38.



competition.’<sup>76</sup> Whilst it was certainly not the case that all high-class West End tailors and outfitters took on the new display techniques, or that those who did, did so wholesale, changes were definitely discernible within the traditional masculine shopping routes which were recognised in the display and retail trade presses as being significant for the industry.

The new man’s shops were believed to be so successful due to their exploitation of men’s vulnerability to display and consumer desires. This was noted by *The Lady* in its review of Simpsons, ‘Shopkeepers, evidently, do not share that masculine theory that a man always knows just what he wants and so is immune from display or advertisement.’<sup>77</sup> The new approach involved for the first time an engagement with the psychology of masculine shopping, which challenges Reekie’s suggestion that ‘the industry’s adoption of psychological and other scientific languages from the 1910s reinforced ... constructions of women as ‘other’ and securely placed men as the subject, and women as the object of knowledge.’<sup>78</sup> It also disrupts the power dynamic between male window dresser, female mannequin and female audience set up by Gronberg and Reekie, mentioned earlier.<sup>79</sup> A. Edward Hammond was clear about the pull of the window for the masculine consumer,

The front containing the windows is the most important part of a shop because it is the point of contact between the owner and the public, and will, therefore, either attract or repel the prospective customer. It must be designed by a man who understands the psychology of the type of customer to be attracted, and must be a shopfront which will put him at his ease and give him confidence in the business behind it.<sup>80</sup>

This reoriented the way in which such businesses worked, creating a new kind of relationship with the traffic of the street. It was important that the psychological discourse was couched in such a way that the shopping cultures weren’t emasculated. The display manager of Hector Powe Ltd. tailors provided evidence of the new attitude, suggesting that in men, as in women, windows could induce a purchasing desire, of a safely subtle, rational and non-excessive kind. The crucial point was that this professional stressed the manipulative, rather than informative, function of the window:

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> *The Lady*, 7 May 1936.

<sup>78</sup> Reekie, Gail, *Temptations: Sex, Selling and the Department Store*, St Leonards NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1993, p.176.

<sup>79</sup> Gronberg, Tag, *Designs on Modernity: Exhibiting the City in 1920’s Paris*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998; Reekie, Gail, *Temptations: Sex, Selling and the Department Store*, St Leonards NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1993, Chapter 5.

<sup>80</sup> A. Edward Hammond (ed.), *Men’s Wear Display: A Practical Work on Window Showmanship and Interior Planning and Equipment*, London: Caxton c.1930, 93



Displays are designed to attract the attention of men who give careful thought to the choice of clothes and who must always present a well-dressed appearance. Such types as bank officials, civil servants, business men, and to a growing extent the younger man entering business who is desirous of creating a good impression ... The window displays are not designed so much to get direct action as gradually impress potential customers with the fact that they are just the people catered for ...<sup>81</sup>

As has been suggested in Part II, Modernism was an important means of reconciling masculinity with modern consumption cultures. The use of window display was a strategy for stores like Simpsons and Austin Reed to forge a modern identity, and also for more traditional businesses to renegotiate their relationship with modernity, in response to the new competition. There were several means of conveying masculinity through display. Most stores did not use male mannequins, although they had been available for some time. [Figure 9.19] A more common approach was to suggest fashionable masculinity in other ways. One method was the construction of 'masculine' settings, for example one early window at Simpsons contextualised a display of jackets with a band of silhouetted sporting activities, and the text, 'The Store for Everything a Man Needs'. However, windows like this also exploited the values associated with the modern display methods used.

The professional literature directed at the menswear trade reflected broader trends in retail display outlined earlier and provided small London tailors and outfitters with display templates drawn from Europe and America, reflecting Modern art movements: in *Window Display for outfitters and Tailors* of 1935 the designs in [Figure 9.20] were accompanied by the text, 'In these days we cannot be deaf to the claims of futurism, cubism and such-like modern tendencies.'<sup>82</sup> The minimalism and rationality of the modern window was felt to be particularly appropriate for the masculine clientele, as Hammond expresses: 'the appeal of the exterior must be primarily to men. The fancy decorations of the window and the surround, and fussy ornamental lettering often favoured for women's fashion shopfronts, are not at all suited to the more constant and less varied merchandise sold to menfolk.'<sup>83</sup> It was also important for the design of displays. An open, geometrical layout was felt to be eminently suitable to attract the rational masculine mind: 'This type of window is systematic. It discourages the flitting of a man's attention from one item to another indiscriminately, as so often happens in women's

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 175-6

<sup>82</sup> *Window Display for Outfitters and Tailors*, London: Blandford, 1935, 18.

<sup>83</sup> A. Edward Hammond (ed.), *Men's Wear Display: A Practical Work on Window Showmanship and Interior Planning and Equipment*, London: Caxton c.1930, 4



displays. It appeals ... subconsciously to the masculinity of shopping. It leaves a man's mind perfectly clear and encourages quick decisions.'<sup>84</sup>

Advice such as this crudely echoed the Loosian and Corbusian Modernist rhetoric described in Part II, and similarly suppressed anxieties about the integral effeminacy of display that even a Modern display vocabulary could not erase. These concerns were reflected in *Art and Industry*'s dual-voiced review of the windows of the new Simpsons. One voice purportedly belonging to an 'expert', the other to a 'man in the street'.<sup>85</sup> The 'man in the street' expressed concern with both the Modern and the spectacular content of the displays:

To be frank, the general effect of the window seemed a bit weird to me. I couldn't really see the point of putting shirts and hats and things in cork and metal frames ... I think the displays were too startling - they took my attention off the goods. It all rather looked like an exhibition; goods displayed neatly on little stands.

The 'expert' betrayed a continued belief that these display methods were 'dishonest', with the subtext that they were inappropriate for men:

I believe that had Simpson put in straight-forward plainly seen and plainly price-marked goods, his windows would not have created the impression I got - that the excellent goods on show were detracted from by unnecessary frills and little stunts. The merchandise at Simpson needs no bush [sic] and the store in itself is attractive enough to satisfy the normal man's appetite for the bizarre.

For *Art and Industry* to take such a stance was disingenuous to say the least: this was a professional journal which had repeatedly expounded the necessity of the retail trade's adoption of up-to-date display and advertising methods, without portraying display's stimulation of sub-conscious desire as especially problematic. The sticking point was apparently the masculinity of the clientele.

The way these anxieties about the relationship between men and shop windows were articulated reveals subtle differences from the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century debates about the morality of spectacular displays. Rather than fears surrounding the seduction of women by consumption, or about the morality and desirability of consumer society, there was a concern that these displays would emasculate men, as *Art and Industry*'s 'man in the

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 83

<sup>85</sup> 'Simpson: Display lessons from a New Store', *Art and Industry*, July 1936, 18-23.



street' put it: 'They reminded me too much of those shops which are selling extremely feminine garments labelled "too-too marvellous", "devastatingly chic", and the like.'<sup>86</sup>

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Thus on one hand the windows of West End shops for men evidenced the new directions within masculine retailing: appealing to new, modern, consuming modes of masculinity. On the other hand, the new display methods provoked anxieties that suggested that these shopping practices and identities were still considered problematic. The shop owners and display designers needed to persuade their clientele that they were not being made fools of, a matter considered further in Part IV.

It is however certain that an enormous premium was placed on the value of shop windows which bordered the West End's shopping streets, specifically because of the way windows constructed a store's image. John Spedan Lewis believed that 'Oxford Street frontage is so valuable that it must be used ... with the utmost care to secure the greatest advantage of the present and future of the House as a whole.'<sup>87</sup> The windows also prove a highly valuable resource for the historian of shopping cultures, for it is the window space, even more than retail architecture or signage, that primarily marked the West End out as a hub of national and international fashionable consumption.

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> *Gazette of the John Lewis Partnership*, 16 August, 1930, 521.



## 10.

### ‘IS IT WISE TO HAVE NEON?’: LIGHTING AND THE WEST END.

Chapters 10 and 11 continue the theme of the spectacular possibilities of the store front as it intersected between the shop and the street, but move beyond the confines of the in-between space of the display window and allow the eye to take in the whole of the façade. In the 1930s West End, stores' façades were treated as canvases, to be strewn with signs, lighting and decoration. This extended the architecture's capacity for fluidity, novelty, spectacle and communication. The story of façade-located spectacle reveals the dual theme of spectacular display and careful control. Part of this control was architectural: a notable characteristic of 1930s shop design was the way in which this kind of spectacle was incorporated into the architecture rather than affixed to a pre-existing surface. At shops like Simpsons, these spectacular practices were deliberately 'designed' elements of the building, coordinated with the architecture and made an integral part of the image of the store. They became a tool to convey a coherent message about shopping and modernity to the passing world. The spectacle was also carefully controlled by the regulatory authorities, who had greater influence over this area than they enjoyed over window display.

Chapter 10 specifically considers the effect and meaning of the application of different kinds of light to shop exteriors. Light has already been identified by several historians as a crucial



element within urban spectacle and modernity.<sup>1</sup> Of course, the lighting of cities at night was not an inter-war phenomenon; after all, the illumination of London through the introduction of comprehensive gas street lighting had been accomplished during the early nineteenth century,<sup>2</sup> and electric commercial advertising was also well developed. Therefore urban lighting would not in and of itself communicate modernity in the 1930s, but the long-standing association between light and urban modernity was a tenacious one, continuing to influence how the lighting of West End shops functioned.

The message of 'modernity' has, however, been differently inflected through successive generations of urban lighting. Nead's study of Victorian London has used light to draw attention to the dual nature of the modern metropolis: whilst street lighting was a key element of the programme to modernise 'Babylonian' London, representing accessibility, vision, rationalisation and 'purification', it was unable to obliterate the presence of obscurity: 'even as gaslight and electricity were lighting up modern cities at night, the fascination with darkness, invisibility and the unconscious was also developing.'<sup>3</sup> Ward's study of lighting in 1920s Germany indicates that this remained an important measure of a modern metropolis, 'In bids for world-city status, one defined a metropolis by its amount of artificial light; it was sincerely believed in 1920s Germany that the sparkle or *Glanz* of other world-cities was due more to their electricity than to anything else.'<sup>4</sup> Urban lighting also has a historiography that connects it intimately with modern consumption cultures. Williams describes the impact of electric lighting in nineteenth-century cities as a key factor in creating a 'dream world' of consumption,<sup>5</sup> whilst Leach sees in the lights of New York's Times Square evidence of the triumph of the new urban commercial cultures from the early twentieth century.<sup>6</sup> Gronberg's story highlights gender, interpreting the prominence of light with 1920s Parisian exhibitions as offering an alternative version of French modernity associated with a feminised, commercial culture, which contrasted with the masculine Corbusian architectural model.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> David Gilbert, 'Floodlights', in Pile, Steve and Thrift, Nigel (eds.), *City A – Z*, London: Routledge, 2000; Gronberg, *Designs on Modernity*; Nead, *Victorian Babylon*; Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Disenchanted Night: The Industrialization of Light in the Nineteenth Century*, Oxford, New York and Hamburg: Berg, 1988; Schlör, *Nights in the Big City*.

<sup>2</sup> Milan discusses the impact of gas light in cities, where it became associated with the spectacular, the industrial, but also the unnatural, helping to explain the slowness of application to the domestic sphere. Sarah Milan, 'Refracting the Gaselier: Understanding Victorian Responses to Domestic Gas Lighting', Inga Bryden & Janet Floyd (eds.) *Domestic Space: Reading the Nineteenth-Century Interior*, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1999. See also Schivelbusch, Wolfgang, *Disenchanted Night: The Industrialization of Light in the Nineteenth Century*, Oxford, New York and Hamburg: Berg, 1988.

<sup>3</sup> Nead, *Victorian Babylon*, 61.

<sup>4</sup> Ward, *Weimar Surfaces*, 102.

<sup>5</sup> Williams, *Dream Worlds*, 85.

<sup>6</sup> Leach, *Land of Desire*.

<sup>7</sup> Gronberg, *Designs on Modernity*.



This study suggests that the West End's lights also communicated a consumption-inflected modernity. [Figure 10.1] Whilst gas still lit the West End's streets, shops and other businesses now used electricity, which produced an altogether different effect. Nead has suggested, 'Gas lights darkness, whereas electricity annihilates it,'<sup>8</sup> and retailers certainly discussed lighting strategy in terms which prioritised the modernity and clarity of vision, and of modern methods. However, this study suggests that in this context, electric lighting also served as a symbol. In line with the particular consumption cultures the lights illuminated, this modernity was not clearly gendered. It was also used in distinctly architectural ways, positioned apparently unproblematically within a Modern visual framework. It was furthermore an important element in the close association between retail, architecture and the Modern, that has been established in Part II.

[Figure 10.2] The neon advertisements at Piccadilly Circus had become a shorthand for the night-time cultures of the capital. However, they were not the only form of commercial illumination. Shops were also an important bearer of the West End's lights, through neon façade signage, illuminated windows and the increasingly integrated nature of light within Modern architecture. Retail, advertising and display trade journals reflected the preoccupation with light. The latest developments in flood lighting, neon tube lighting and the illumination of goods in windows were considered of great interest, and foreign examples were frequently published.<sup>9</sup> *Store* had a special regular section entitled 'Store lighting and signs'. Stores were prepared to devote significant resources to exterior lighting. For example, *Commercial Art* reported in April 1930 that four major Paris stores: the Louvre, the Bon Marché, the Bazar de l'Hotel de Ville and Galleries Lafayette, employed the services of Fernand Jacopozzi, the celebrated French lighting specialist who created false trails for the Germans during World War One, including a decoy 'Gare de L'Est.'<sup>10</sup>

The architectural profession matched this preoccupation with the qualities of light. In 1936 *Art and Industry* reported from a Parisian lighting exhibition. Exhibitors included leading Modernist architect and theorist Le Corbusier, who urged recognition of lighting's possibilities, 'Light? We are still children ... The way is open to us, but it is utterly

<sup>8</sup> Nead, *Victorian Babylon*, 83

<sup>9</sup> See for example article on illuminated signage and decoration in *Commercial Art* October 1930, 161-163, and 'Light as advertiser', *Commercial Art*, December 1931, 240 – 248.

<sup>10</sup> *Commercial Art* reported in April 1930.



undeveloped.’<sup>11</sup> Modernists all over the world were already taking up this challenge. Ward has outlined the particular importance of Weimar Germany in this story, charting the development of *Lichtarchitektur*: ‘buildings were conceived of ... in relation not just to their material monumentality by day but to their illusionary monumentality by night.’<sup>12</sup> Simpsons chose for its architect a man who was experienced in using light in a retail context. The store prioritised lighting within its design, commissioning important experimental work for the external lighting of the store. The resultant effects were certainly striking: a neon sign spelling out the name of the store which could be moved around the façade, flood lighting in a variety of colours and illuminated bands of windows. This was showmanship; aligning the store with the dramatic lighting of the modern fairground and cinema. It also contributed to a distinctly theatrical spectacle, both spotlighting goods within the window and the shop within the city’s streets.<sup>13</sup> The lighting of the West End’s stores did more than simply grab the attention: it communicated important messages about the way in which London’s shopping cultures were modern.

#### ‘THE NOISIEST THING IN DISPLAY ADVERTISING’

[Figure 10.3] *Art and Industry* was of the opinion that ‘The noisiest thing in display advertising is neon-lighting. From all corners and streets we are winked at, flashed at and jumped at by neon.’<sup>14</sup> These unavoidable neon signs formed the core of the spectacle of light that had come to define the entertainment and retail sectors of many Western capitals, attracting revellers and tourists.<sup>15</sup> During the 1930s, London’s lights marked out both the city’s modernity and its established character. In William Gaunt’s sentimental *London Promenade*, the neon signs at Piccadilly Circus were celebrated as one of the defining characteristics of London,

At the rapidly-changing centre of the world nothing seems to remain fixed except a small bastion of old buildings covered with the skeleton framework of electric signs. Unlike Broadway, of course, but with a cheerfulness of their own. At night the sky gradates into a deep velvety smoke-laden blue. On the rich pall the words Booth’s Gin spring into sparkling life and an electric cocktail shaker pours foaming

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<sup>11</sup> ‘Salon of Light’, *Art and Industry*, April 1936, 136.

<sup>12</sup> Ward, Janet, *Weimar Surfaces: Urban Visual Culture in 1920s Germany*, Berkely, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2001, 111.

<sup>13</sup> The historical association between urban lighting and theatre is discussed in Gilbert, ‘Floodlights’.

<sup>14</sup> *Art and Industry*, April 1936, 152.

<sup>15</sup> See for example the description of Piccadilly Circus, *London: The World's Largest City*, Edinburg: A. Walker and Son, 1938, 8.



electric lamps into a glass. The Army Club Major scintillates a monocle and smokes incessant cigarettes, the wheels of the Overland Car spin brightly round, while Cannes coruscates on a Regency façade in electric reds and greens. And during the day the signs make a curious black scaffolding full of detail.<sup>16</sup>

[Figure 4.23] The West End's shop signs contributed to this light show, frequently back-lit, or incorporating neon tubing. They labelled the building with the identity of the store, and communicated modernity through both graphics and the type of lighting.

[Figure 10.4] Modernist and moderne architecture of the period were both notable for their use of graphics, either as fixed signage, or carved into the building, as at Emberton's Olympia exhibition building. This graphic prominence points again to the importance of commercial building types within the Modern oeuvre: factories, cinemas, shops and exhibitions. It also strengthens the argument made in Part II about the heightened awareness of the advertising value of architecture. The more modern-minded architectural journals of the period showed a marked interest in signage as architectural graphics, often linking discussions of lighting and graphic signage, joined by their shared potential for architectural spectacle and communication.

For the retailers, of course, these spectacular signs were primarily about advertising, positioned within a long tradition shop signage.<sup>17</sup> [Figure 10.5] Simpsons' approach to signage reveals an awareness of the advertising potential of the sign. There was specially designed graphic signage by Ashley Havinden. Several lighting companies joined the store in their search for ever more advanced neon signage systems, and the Simpsons Archive shows that the financial liability for this experimental technical work was hotly contested.<sup>18</sup>

The use of the façade as advertising was however a historically contested issue,<sup>19</sup> and was certainly an important component of retail's conflict with planning authorities in the 1930s West End. Regulations restricted the positioning of retail signs and curtailed the use of flashing effects.<sup>20</sup> Simpsons' neon sign was a typical example: complicated negotiations with the authorities, in addition to technical problems, meant that it was not erected until after

<sup>16</sup> William Gaunt, *London Promenade*, London: The Studio, 1930, 77.

<sup>17</sup> See David Garrioch, 'House Names, Shop Signs and Social Organization in Western European Cities, 1500 - 1900', *Urban History*, April 1994, 20-48.

<sup>18</sup> Correspondence with Claude-General Neon Lights Ltd, 11 March 1936, 22 April 1936, Simpsons Archive.

<sup>19</sup> Garrioch describes the history of the restriction of signage and resistance of control. Garrioch, 'House Names, Shop Signs and Social Organization'.

<sup>20</sup> The regulations were set out in Bryan and Norman Westwood, *Smaller Retail Shops*, London: The Architectural Press, 1937, 33



opening. Alexander Simpson was furious with his architect about the failure to resolve these issues in time, indicating the importance of the sign to the business, 'It is difficult for me to be annoyed with a man who has done so much for me, but I am - quite honestly - upset that the signs in Piccadilly are not completed'.<sup>21</sup>

*Store* interpreted the restrictions as evidence of an anti-commercial spirit, further evidence of the problematic nature of retail architecture identified in Part II. It printed an article entitled 'Goodbye Piccadilly! A potential menace to retail sales promotion', which expressed resentment at how the Town and Country Planning Act of 1932 was being used to restrict the size of signage to an unreasonable extent, even when it appeared in the interior of a shop window.<sup>22</sup> Mr Simpson's discussions with Joseph Emberton suggest that the problems over signage might also be connected to particular class connotations of neon lighting. Simpson wrote anxiously to his architect during the planning stages, 'With regard to your suggestion for the name on the Jermyn Street front, do you think it is wise to have Neon in this street? ... It seems to be against the character of a high-class shop in Jermyn Street.'<sup>23</sup> The store owner did not wish his architect to draw inspiration from his Blackpool Pleasure Beach illuminations in this location.

The signs should also be acknowledged as instrumental in the construction of brand and shopping networks in this period. Garrioch has shown how shop signs had traditionally both flagged up the location of a shop within the street, and also helped to construct shops as local landmarks, used as markers in the of navigating the city.<sup>24</sup> In the 1930s, the signs helped to construct the imagined networks associated with the multiple stores which stretched across the country. Simpsons' can also be seen to function in this way. Mr Simpson was clear that the neon sign on the Piccadilly frontage connected the new shop with Simpson Ltd Agents working from outfitters throughout the country, and with the temporary premises in Regent Street used for display prior to opening.<sup>25</sup> It was imperative that this landscape of signage was ready for the opening day, so that these national networks could spring into being. Mr Simpson urged his architect, 'I want all these signs up throughout the country by April 28<sup>th</sup> and, of course, there is no time to lose.'<sup>26</sup> Through the store's coordinated graphic approach, further links were made between the sign and the graphic landscape which consisted of the

<sup>21</sup> Letter from Alexander Simpson to Joseph Emberton, Simpsons Archive.

<sup>22</sup> *Store*, September 1937, 352-3.

<sup>23</sup> Letter Alexander Simpson to Joseph Emberton, 31 March 1936, Simpsons Archive.

<sup>24</sup> Garrioch, 'House Names, Shop Signs and Social Organization'.

<sup>25</sup> Letter from Alexander Simpson to Joseph Emberton, 17 July 1935, Simpsons Archive.

<sup>26</sup> Letter Alexander Simpson to Joseph Emberton, 7 February 1936, Simpsons Archive.



‘Simpson Piccadilly’ logo in press advertisements, letterheads, catalogues and other ephemera, connecting the shop with national networks of consumers.

### ‘THE GLOW OF OUR WINDOWS’

[Figure 9.19] The illumination of shop windows also contributed to the spectacle of light in the West End. Window lights had become increasingly effective and much safer by the 1930s, so were more commonly used. Lighting the window extended the shop’s hours by enabling window-shopping after dark. It was seen by retailers as an excellent publicity exercise. Austin Reed advertised in the *Evening Standard* in 1935,

If you have recently visited Regent Street after dark, you will no doubt have noticed how the winter of your discontent is made glorious summer by the glow of our windows. The secret lies in a new type of floodlighting just installed – the first of its kind ... most people regard it as a delightful addition to London nights. It is, as a fact, the only part of the Austin Reed Service that we can continue to offer after seven.<sup>27</sup>

The extension of spectacular displays into the night exposed them to different audiences. We have seen how at night the Champs Elysées’ promenaders were invited into shop display areas after hours. The West End was transformed into a place of entertainment, peopled by crowds of pleasure seekers who could well become customers by the light of day. But there were also others who came uninvited by the retailers, a point made starkly in *London Promenade*’s tableau of Wardour street prostitutes, ‘... beams of light that illuminate these idealistic forms illuminate also other forms, watchful realities.’<sup>28</sup>

[Figures 10.6 and 10.7] Window lighting was also used during the day to increase the potency of displays, adding to the repertoire of spectacular strategies discussed in Chapter 9. Retailers took a scientific approach, carefully calculating light levels to enhance displays. Westwood and Westwood advised on suitable wattages for different locations, reporting that ‘careful tests were made to ascertain the effect of increased intensity of light in shop windows. It was found that an increase from 15 ft. candles to 100 ft. candles resulted in 70 per cent more people stopping to look at the windows.’<sup>29</sup> [Figure 10.8] The windows of Peter Jones had been

<sup>27</sup> *Evening Standard*, 1 January 1935, 7.

<sup>28</sup> William Gaunt, *London Promenade*, London: The Studio, 1930, 20.

<sup>29</sup> Westwood, Bryan and Norman, *Smaller Retail Shops*, London: The Architectural Press, 1937, 70.



specially designed to make the most of natural as well as artificial illumination, drawing daylight in through concealed openings above the canopy, and cleverly reflecting it around the display space. The review brochure describes this process,

The window backs of panelled hardwoods usually used in this type of shop have been replaced by a plain painted plaster surface curved forward to the top of the transom light. In addition to the daylight from this clerestory window, the plaster surface can be illuminated by floodlights from below, the colour and intensity of which can be changed as required, enabling an almost perfect background to be provided for any class or colour of goods to be displayed.<sup>30</sup>

[Figure 10.5] Undercutting the pragmatism of the retailers’ rhetoric about vision were the incontrovertible links with the other lighting strategies of the store, and with the city at large: windows did more than merely illuminate the goods. At Simpsons, the lit display window formed the bottom rung in a series of illuminated glazed bands, working in concert with the signage and with the floodlighting effects discussed in the next part of this chapter. Gronberg suggests that ‘the main function of light was to produce the phantasmagoria of the commodity – to conceal as much as it revealed.’<sup>31</sup> She describes the boutique windows of Paris, ‘The artificial light from the shop-windows seemed to erupt into both the sky and the river – a flood of light flowing from the heart of the city’ transforming it into a ‘city of light’.<sup>32</sup> Her account of the position of the window within an illuminated capital of consumption is persuasive, and provides a useful context for interpreting the glow of the West End’s own windows.

### FLOOD LIGHTING: ‘AN ESSENTIAL COMPONENT OF MODERN ARCHITECTURAL STYLE’

When Simpsons opened, its use of floodlighting attracted considerable attention in the professional architectural and popular press. This thesis has already established the client’s belief in the centrality of the building’s design to the whole enterprise. He consequently thought that illuminating the architecture in this way would only increase its use as publicity and praised his architect, ‘The lighting of the building is undoubtedly a masterpiece and its advertising value should be almost incalculable.’<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup> *A Review of the New Shop for Peter Jones*, c.1936, John Lewis Partnership Archives, 252/2.

<sup>31</sup> Gronberg, *Designs on Modernity*, 6.

<sup>32</sup> Gronberg, *Designs on Modernity*, 4.

<sup>33</sup> Letter from Alexander Simpson to Joseph Emberton 28 February 1936, Simpsons Archive.



Floodlighting also represented the most architectural use of light by the West End's shops, and it was this that allowed the design of a store like Simpsons to convey such a powerful and coherent identity to the inhabitants of the street. Floodlighting deliberately illuminated, accentuated and transformed architectural features rather than commodities or graphic signs. By night, it transformed Modern buildings into an assemblage of gradated planes, heightening the depth of shadow and sharpening contrast. Thus floodlit buildings adopted the qualities of the new architectural photography made popular by photographers such as Dell and Wainwright, discussed in Chapter 5. [Figure 10.9] Conversely, night-time views became a favourite way of representing new shops within the architectural press, a typical example being *Architecture Illustrated*'s coverage of the new Drage's store in Oxford Street.

Floodlighting was seen as a marker, and a producer, of a store's newness and modernity of aesthetic. For example the *Manchester Guardian*'s review of Simpsons highlighted this aspect of the store, 'It will make history in West End shop architecture, for it is the first building of the kind with a frontage designed particularly for floodlighting effects.'<sup>34</sup> The *Architect and Building News* made more specific comments about the distinctly Modern nature of this kind of lighting, 'The management of the floodlighting troughs argues recognition of lighting as an essential component of modern architectural style.'<sup>35</sup>

During the 1930s new advances were made in floodlighting technology. *Commercial Art and Industry* reported,

A remarkable new colour flood-lighting invention has just emerged from the Research Laboratories of the General Electric Co. Ltd ... the new system employs a gaseous discharge lamp which gives a radiant coloured light of blue, green or red, which can be mixed and blended to produce gorgeous colour effects ... . As a decorative medium this new system of coloured floodlighting ... is likely to bring about revolutionary changes in architecture and decoration.<sup>36</sup>

[Figure 10.10] By the time of his Simpsons commission, architect Joseph Emberton had already experimented with lighting effects in his shops, particularly neon signage. At Simpsons he drew more heavily on the example of Mendlesohn's use of floodlighting in his Modern Schocken stores,<sup>37</sup> and was undoubtedly also influenced by Simpsons display manager, Moholy Nagy, who had lectured on the effect of coloured light at the Bauhaus.

<sup>34</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 30 April 1936.

<sup>35</sup> *Architect and Building News*, May 8, 1936, 155.

<sup>36</sup> *Commercial Art and Industry*, June 1933, 249-51.

<sup>37</sup> Mendlesohn's use of light is discussed in James, 'From Messel to Mendelsohn'.



Despite the dramatic impression of black and white contrast created by early photographs of the Simpsons, the floodlighting system was designed with three differently coloured neon tubes - red, blue and green – carried by bronze reflector troughs above each window head and up each side of the building. Used together, the tubes illuminated the smooth planes of Portland stone with a white light, used separately or in pairs they could provide a variety of colours. This was pushing the boundaries of ‘acceptable’ West End light spectacle, and the store records show that special permission had to be sought to use coloured illumination during the opening fortnight.<sup>38</sup>

These dramatic lighting effects were not an appendage, but were integral to the architecture of the façade. Not only did they allow the architecture to function completely differently by night, but the material architecture was designed as a canvas for them. The store minutes record that ‘Mr Emberton showed Mr Simpson his design for the elevation explaining how this had been influenced by the general interest in floodlighting and street decoration.’<sup>39</sup> The stone facings of the building’s façade were not as simple as they appeared, but were strategically angled to provide screens for the projected light show. *Industrial Arts* reported, ‘Evenness of lighting has been secured by inclining the various surfaces towards the source of light illuminating them, not necessarily all in the same vertical plane.’<sup>40</sup> Emberton insisted that the integrity of the lighting was recognised, causing his client, fearing he had offended his architect by failing to praise him sufficiently on this point, to write a conciliatory note in the aftermath of a heated meeting conceding that he did indeed understand that ‘the lighting is part of the building and not merely a feat of engineering...’.<sup>41</sup>

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The public spectacle described in this chapter provided a contrast with the interiority and domesticity of the soft lights of suburbia, illuminating a very different aspect of inter-war life. The West End’s lights were very much part of street life, shopping cultures and retail strategies. The signs, windows and floodlighting of the West End’s shops, particularly of the new arrivals, helped to assure these shops a prominent position within the spectacle of this place, a spectacle which, during the 1930s, carried a dominant message of modernity. The

<sup>38</sup> Report of meeting, 5 March 1936, Simpsons Archive.

<sup>39</sup> Report of ‘meeting 2’, 4 July 1935, Simpsons Archive.

<sup>40</sup> *Industrial Arts* Summer 1936, 94.

<sup>41</sup> Letter Alexander Simpson to Joseph Emberton, 6 March 1936, Simpsons Archive.



lights thus provided yet another nexus for the modernity of shopping cultures and Modern design. The images of the various kinds of West End retail lighting explored in this chapter have allowed for conclusions that move beyond the pragmatic and technical rhetoric of the retail profession about light. It would seem that these lights functioned less as instruments of visibility and clarity, than as agents of a kind of spectacle that celebrated the shopping cultures located in the West End, in particular, their modernity.



## 11.

### DRESSING UP: PAGEANTS AND PARTIES

One particular aspect of the West End's spectacle positioned the shopping streets at the centre of national and international arenas, strengthening the imagined networks of shopping discussed in Part I. A series of events took place in the 1930s, notably national pageants along shopping routes and the celebration of the opening of new West End stores. These were occasions for the staging of national identity, consumption cultures and store identity through parades, parties and the decoration of stores. This kind of pageantry can be positioned within a long tradition of the demonstrations of civic and patriotic allegiance by retail businesses. It can also be linked to a location of popular protest and celebration within cities' streets.<sup>1</sup> Historians have also identified pageantry as a particularly important element of inter-war national life, which helps to account for the attention and resources expended by local authorities, businesses and the public on these practices. Chapter 11 can be seen to deal with the most fleeting of spectacles associated with shopping cultures, expressing most effectively individual moments in the life of the West End. However, it is often these kinds of spectacle that have proved most enduring within public memory, in the mythologies of the individual stores and of the West End as a place, and in archive collections.

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<sup>1</sup> This history is discussed in the introduction to Driver and Gilbert, *Imperial Cities*.



## THE WEST END PAGEANT: 'ALL THE TRADITIONAL TRAPPINGS OF A FAIRY STORY' OR 'AN EVENT IN MODERN LIFE'?

[Figure 11.1] The Jubilee of 1935 and the Coronation of 1937 provided the two most important occasions in the period for West End stores to participate collectively in pageantry. Chapter 3 has already discussed how West End shopping streets also functioned as national parade routes. Here, the subject is revisited, showing how the stores lining these routes used spectacular practices, particularly the additional decoration of their illuminated façades, to participate actively in such national pageantry, whilst simultaneously advancing their own identities. Layers of flowers, banners, flags, painted drapes and light created a patriotic spectacle more ephemeral, yet more spectacular, than the Imperial architecture of Regent Street. [Figure 11.2] The special guides mapping out the illuminations and decorations made it clear that the shopping routes were at the very centre of the spectacles of the Jubilee and Coronation, the shops themselves a pivotal component alongside the royal cortège and flag-waving public.

During the 1930s, the façades of new shops were deliberately designed to be decorated for Christmas, coronations and other festivals and parades, working in concert with special illuminations and themed window displays. [Figure 11.3] The smooth planes of Simpsons' façade were intended to function on occasion as a foundation for decorations, designed with special fixings for this purpose. This was Emberton's speciality, and he drew on his experience with the Empire Hall at Olympia of 1930, which he had designed with permanent fixings for advertising the exhibitions. Peter Jones incorporated decorations into its external design in different ways: it had an integral window box, as the *Bayswater Chronicle* reported, 'The largest window box in the world is being erected in London ... the new window box ... will bring a thousand feet of flowers into the heart of London.'<sup>2</sup> The newly permitted cantilevered canopy also provided spectacular possibilities: as A. Edwards Hammond noted, 'scope for these canopies as stages for temporary illuminations, sale announcements, Christmas decorations, and other forms of external publicity can be increased by inclusion of sockets (or grooves) and brackets for screens and backgrounds.'<sup>3</sup> As with the development of architectural lighting, the facility for spectacle enabled West End retail architecture to take on a flexible visual identity, but also ensured a measure of architectural control over the

<sup>2</sup> *Bayswater Chronicle*, 25 July 1936.

<sup>3</sup> A. Edwards Hammond, 'Store: construction and Equipment: A forecast based on observation of recent developments', *Store Annual*, 1939, 249.



traditional practice of façade decoration. Certainly, on the surface of a Modern store like Simpsons the combined spectacle of display, signage, light and decorations worked in tandem with the architecture to present a distinctly modern image to the street.

The fact that modern retail cultures embraced façade decoration created the potential for particularly dramatic street scenes, when stores dressed up in concert. *Advertiser's Weekly* described the spectacle of Regent Street at the Coronation, 'at the Piccadilly end there was a row of blue and gold banners covering a number of shop façades. Then there was a change to a carnival effect – rows of baskets of coloured flowers. A curve in the street... revealed a series of purple banners on which crowns were painted.'<sup>4</sup> It was however, more usual for the big stores to retain control of their decorations, and thus they made more of an individual statement. For example, during the Coronation, Liberty's featured a row of blue and pink hydrangeas between garlands of silver laurels. Simpsons allocated the significant sum of five hundred pounds for its Coronation decorations, which consisted of a geometric trellis of roses covering the façade,<sup>5</sup> a design that was singled out for praise in the *Advertiser's Weekly* review.

In Leach's study of inter-war retail culture in North America, he discusses the rise of the commercial parade, events which were funded, and carefully scripted, by the big department stores like Macy's, which even paid their employees to march.<sup>6</sup> These parades might have been eventually adopted by the city as cultural events, but Leach sees them as essentially commercial exercises, cynically intended to promote businesses. This study of the West End's role in Jubilee and Coronation celebrations reveals important parallels with Leach's findings about the use of pageants to stage identity in inter-war metropolitan culture. However, it suggests a different emphasis on the commercial: whilst participating stores certainly had their own agenda, the occasions were created and represented as 'national pageant', with a dominant message about reaffirming Britishness and Empire rather than consumer cultures. Furthermore, the celebrations were instigated and regulated by local and national government bodies. These forms of celebrations belonged in a long popular tradition of state processions, street parades and carnival, which Leach ignores.

*London the Wonder City* framed the Coronation in this way:

<sup>4</sup> *Advertiser's Weekly*, 13 May 1937, 228.

<sup>5</sup> Board of Directors minutes 11 January 1937, 9 February 1937, Simpsons Archive.

<sup>6</sup> Leach, *Land of Desire*, 326-8.



The magnificent cavalcade of the Coronation Procession which, on May 12th, will pass through the main streets of the Metropolis has caused more world excitement than any major event of the past quarter century. Monarchs from all parts of the globe, who will come to London to honour the King, will drive in this most gorgeous of processions. All the traditional trappings of a fairy story rather than an event in modern life; scarlet, and gold, and purple, and the gleaming jewels, the uniforms of the military and the regalia of the officers of state will do honour to the traditions of a great nation.<sup>7</sup>

[Figure 11.4] The motifs of the stores' decorations contribute to a reading of these events as 'national pageantry'. Royal emblems and depiction of British historical figures and events proliferated, as *Harpers Bazaar* noted, 'The Coronation has given the shops great scope for inspiration. They have run riot, placing crowns, lions, feathers and Coronation emblems on and around every kind of little gadget.'<sup>8</sup> The *Advertiser's Weekly* described the 'Royal Historical Cavalcade' at D. H. Evans and the 'sweetmeat reproduction of the throne in Westminster Abbey, on which the King is crowned' at the Marble Arch Lyons Corner House.<sup>9</sup>

[Figure 11.5] The *Architectural Review* was less impressed by what it saw as the indiscriminate adoption of historical imagery. It scoffed at Messrs. Swears and Wells' 'unique it incomprehensible historical display' illustrated here,

What exactly was the significance of this staggering *mélange* which included Queen Victoria and a clever combination of the central figure of the Botticelli's Primavera with the background of the same artist's Birth of Venus, is still open to varying interpretations ... . Of the other great shops Messrs. Derry and Toms' gigantic Britannia (or was it Boadicea?) careering across that modernistic façade in a four-horse chariot was one of the most surprising...<sup>10</sup>

Although these events were primarily celebrations of about nationhood, stores' participation, at considerable expense, was of course motivated by the desire to promote trade. [Figure 11.6] Significantly, in Selfridges' published portfolio of illustrations of their spectacular decorations, crowds were shown flocking to the store, rather than watching the royal cortège drive past.<sup>11</sup> Such campaigns went beyond straightforwardly advertising individual stores, contributing to broader attempts to raise the profile of the West End, forging a link between its consumption cultures, patriotism and shared national culture. [Figure 11.7] This was aligned with a tradition situated outside the retail sphere which promoted shopping for British goods in

<sup>7</sup> *London the Wonder City*, Pullman Car Company, 1937, 17.

<sup>8</sup> *Harpers Bazaar*, May 37, 104.

<sup>9</sup> *Advertiser's Weekly*, 13 May 1937, p.228.

<sup>10</sup> *Architectural Review*, June 1937.

<sup>11</sup> Front cover, *A Portfolio of Selfridge's Decorations for the Coronation*, May 1937, National Monuments Record.



Britain as a patriotic activity, exemplified in a London Underground poster campaign of 1931, with the slogan, 'Your Christmas. All British whatever you buy'. *Store* advised its retailer readers how this association could heighten the merchandising potential of Coronation week,

Topical factors reinforcing the "Buy British Goods" appeal should be given serious consideration when the sales promotional activities for the period immediately preceding and following the Coronation are being planned. It is fairly certain that during this period the latent patriotism of even the least demonstrative of people will be awakened into some kind of activity, and that – at least for a short while – the public at large will be 'thinking Imperial'.<sup>12</sup>

Another important benefit for retailers lay in the possibility of increased visitor and tourist trade during festivities, although direct and immediate profits were not assured. The *Draper's Record* provided a commentary on trade levels during Jubilee week: Selfridges reported a substantial increase in trade, whereas John Lewis's profits were down significantly.<sup>13</sup> The benefit lay rather in a longer-term raised national and international profile of the West End, and the prominence of its shops as tourist sites. It is clear from London guidebooks that pageantry, ranging from changing of the guard to Coronation parades, was an established tourist attraction, which defined central London.<sup>14</sup> This opportunity for international promotion was seized during the Coronation. The guidebook *London with my Young Friends* included a walk past Selfridges, 'the great store ... a wonderful building, which was exquisitely decorated for the Coronation celebrations, and was one of the sights of London during that period.'<sup>15</sup> [emphasis added] Having the world's eyes and ears also encouraged stores to advertise themselves using a framework of the broader networks of fashionable consumption discussed in Part I. Hence in 1937, Dolcis advertised its shops as the location of 'the world's most beautiful shoes'.<sup>16</sup>

Important parallels can be drawn between this kind of 'city boosterism' and the use of spectacle and representations of the urban in international exhibitions in this period. Gronberg's analysis of the 1925 Paris exhibition is enlightening in this respect:

Such exhibitions involved a symbiotic relationship with the city; the exhibition staged Paris in order that 'Paris' might play its part in – and enhance – the exhibition's showcasing of French commodities. The

<sup>12</sup> 'Empire Windows', *Store* April 1937, 200.

<sup>13</sup> *Draper's Record*, 25 May 1935.

<sup>14</sup> See for example the chapter on pageantry and ceremonies in the London guidebook, W.D.H. McCullough, *London*, London: The Travel and Industrial Development Association of Great Britain and Ireland, 1938.

<sup>15</sup> Charles A. Dunckner, *Seeing London with my Young Friends: a Guide to all the Places of Interest in London*, 1936, 120.

<sup>16</sup> Advertisement in *London the Wonder City*, Pullman Car Company, 1937, 51.



emphasis on urban spectacle in 1925 therefore involved not only a promotion of the French capital as travellers' destination on behalf of the tourist industry, but also an insistence on (and reassertion of) the glamour of Paris in the interests of the post-war drive to establish the status of French goods on the international market place.<sup>17</sup>

There was, then, a tension between the patriotic and the commercial within the West End's pageants, which was evidenced very clearly in the debate about store decorations. The local authorities in charge of the West End betrayed a strong impulse to control the spectacle of stores' façades, to visually unify it into a communal, patriotic display. Their attempts to rein in spectacular excess echoed their anxious regulation of retail architecture and lighting, discussed in previous chapters. Marylebone Council Works Committee had responsibility for the regulation of Coronation decorations for their portion of the West End.<sup>18</sup> As well as regulating individual store displays, they commissioned the decorations within the streets, Marylebone and Westminster councils working with a combined budget of approximately £6,700. [Figure 11.8] The *Architectural Review* surveyed the council's designs, revealing the prominence of 'taste' within the debate, and also an underlying tussle to control the aesthetic, and thus the message, of the decorations: 'The municipal endeavours, with the exception of Bond Street, which looked like some Brobdignagian suburb on washing day, were better than we had any reason to expect; the glorified maypoles in St. James' Street, Oxford Street and Trafalgar Square, were singularly gay and free from the taint of municipal art...'<sup>19</sup> The exception mentioned was actually Anne Acland's award winning designs for Bond Street.<sup>20</sup>

[Figure 11.9] One of the focuses of the battle for control of the decorations was the way the local authority and store decorations competed with each other for attention within the street. For example, here the council's standards are seen abutting John Lewis's banners in Oxford Street.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, the architectural profession consistently and vociferously argued for a unified display through its professional mouthpieces. This really amounted to a thinly disguised discourse about taste, bringing to the surface concerns about the dissonance between ephemeral commercial spectacle and serious material, which as Part II has shown was prevalent within some professional quarters. The Modern voice of the *Architectural Review* associated what it perceived as lapses in taste with the rampant, individualistic commercial

<sup>17</sup> Gronberg, *Designs on Modernity*, 15.

<sup>18</sup> The *Marylebone Record* regularly reported the pronouncements of the Marylebone Council Works Committee. See for example the *Marylebone Record*, 13 March, 1937.

<sup>19</sup> *Architectural Review*, June 1937.

<sup>20</sup> Dean, *The Thirties*, 28, 38.

<sup>21</sup> Photograph of the erection of Oxford Street Coronation decorations, 1937, John Lewis Archive, 2397/e.



impulses of retailers, each wishing to design his own decorations, and to stand out amongst its neighbours: 'For weeks beforehand we had been told that this time a real effort was to be made to co-ordinate all the various schemes; happily this gallant effort was once more crowned with failure and rugged individualism scored another triumph...'. The *Architectural Review* concluded that it was the architectural nature of the spectacle, and indeed its substitution for the store's façade, that was the problem: 'as long as people confine themselves to flags and streamers all is well; it is when they start draping the façades that trouble begins.'<sup>22</sup> *Advertiser's Weekly* was more explicit about its worries over taste,

Oxford Circus probably represented the most unfortunate example of Coronation display on the whole route. Here was a key point, the junction of two great shopping streets, where a carefully planned display would have made all the difference. But the general effect was gallingly inartistic and incongruous. Yellow, purple, red, white, blue, pink, green, gold and silver were jumbled together in a startling and drunken orgy.<sup>23</sup>

This publication's conclusion about the Coronation decorations as a whole was framed very much in terms of the art and design professions' dominant tastes: 'Gone is the drabness of British decorations of the Victorian decade. But in its place is a gaiety that is a little too obvious, a flamboyance that speaks of Elizabethan pageantry rather than Georgian utilitarianism.'<sup>24</sup> The concern was clearly that the decorations were not sufficiently Modern, and thus compromised the integrity of the architecture. The subtext was that this was inevitable as irrepressible commercial impulses were incompatible with the theoretical and aesthetic basis of Modern design. This is a completely different stance on the relationship between retail, spectacle and Modernism from that suggested by the design of store such as Simpsons and Peter Jones, and offers more evidence of the divided nature of architectural thinking on this issue.

However, there was also a gathering sense that the shops' spectacular façade decorations and their connection with patriotic pageantry were also problematic for a very different reason, connected to the tensions mounting on the international political scene in the mid 1930s. The establishment sculptor, Sir William Reid Dick, was advisor on Coronation decorations for the journal *Store*. He made some unsettling comments on this topic, 'Those who saw the display in Nuremberg or the great rally last year will agree that uniformity in decoration can produce

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<sup>22</sup> *Architectural Review*, June 1937.

<sup>23</sup> *Advertiser's Weekly*, 13 May 1937, 228.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*



the most striking effects.’<sup>25</sup> The *Architectural Review* was more overtly worried about this link, ‘Peter Jones’s long red streamers [were] one of the simplest and most effective, albeit in conjunction with the architecture slightly reminiscent of Berlin on the Fuehrer’s birthday.’<sup>26</sup> The *Advertiser’s Weekly* expressed its concerns about the poor taste of the decorations even more explicitly, in its comments on Oxford Street, but identified associations with rather different political cultures: ‘Seeing a long row of banner-like red flags one wondered for an awful moment if Big Business had gone communistic. But, no, it was merely a series of red flags bearing miniature gold lions that hung from John Lewis and other buildings.’<sup>27</sup> At this moment, it is clear that the traditional practice of decorating buildings was being appropriated to convey some very opposing messages: Modernism, consumption cultures, patriotism and more extreme political positions.

In the event, despite their vocal reservations, architects generally retained a substantial degree of control of the store decorations and the resultant message. Grey Wornum, respected designer of the Royal Institute of British Architects’ building, was one of the architects appointed to advise on the co-ordination of Coronation decorations in Westminster and Marylebone.<sup>28</sup> Retained store architects like Emberton at Simpsons were usually consulted on decorative schemes. Decorations were often to a large extent integrated with, or at least related to, architecture, and their messages cannot easily be divorced from the pre-existing architectural meanings.

#### OPENING CELEBRATIONS: SAILING SPICK AND SPAN ON THE MAIDEN VOYAGE

In the 1930s West End, stores also engaged in another kind of pageantry, which staged their individual identities more explicitly: the ‘Grand Opening’. The opening did not present the building swathed in decorations, but rather constituted a metaphorical unveiling, arresting the attention of the press and the public and thus launching the identity of the store. These events captured its identity at a fixed moment in time and space, and also signified a new beginning, a marker in the West End’s ongoing process of renewal, described in Part II. It was this event that would trigger the reconfigurations, however small-scale, of the West End’s shopping routes, that were examined in Part I.

<sup>25</sup> ‘Coronation Displays’, *Store* October 1936, 20-21

<sup>26</sup> *Architectural Review*, June 1937.

<sup>27</sup> *Advertiser’s Weekly*, 13 May 1937, 228.

<sup>28</sup> Reported in *Store*, November 1936, 51.



‘Time’ has frequently provided a framework for department store histories. Within the narratives of consumption, the ‘opening’ features prominently, particularly within histories of specific companies.<sup>29</sup> These stories often exploit the richness in the material culture of the opening within department store archives: press cuttings, photographs, invitations and other ephemera. They use the opening event as a marker within their chronological accounts, which track the progression of a store from its beginning, through a series of expansions, take-overs, closures due to bombs, fires and bankruptcy, and spectacular re-openings. These are celebratory stories, as Benson and Ugolini note, ‘Narratives of the founding of these outlets still depend to a surprising extent on notions of an “exceptional man with an exceptional idea.”’<sup>30</sup> Rappaport’s more analytical study of the Victorian and Edwardian West End uses the openings of Whiteley’s in 1863 and Selfridge’s in 1909 as mechanisms to discuss the changed retail cultures they represented. However, existing histories have generally failed to address the important role of the opening as *pageant* and, connectedly, as advertising. These roles were clearly related. Indeed, for Marks and Spencer, newspaper publicity for stores’ openings was the only form of advertising conducted. These occasions were not as rare as might be assumed: most stores exploited the opportunities offered by their piecemeal development to readjust and reassert their identity on the completion of an extension, to inaugurate a new department, or a move to a new site.

The relationship between the opening and the store’s chronology is nevertheless something worthy of re-examination. A case study of the opening of Simpsons reveals the opening as an important event; a business strategy, a means of forging a connection with the city, its constituent streets and shopping crowds. It casts light on the evolving relationship between the store and its own history, as the meaning of the Simpsons brand swung from modernity, novelty and fashionability towards quality, reliability, tradition and even conservatism. This shift in meaning serves to highlight the ephemerality and fragility of West End shopping cultures, which has been a central theme of this thesis.

On 29 April 1936 a crowd gathered in London’s Piccadilly in front of the striking new shop. Many people were there to catch a glimpse of Sir Malcolm Campbell, holder of the world land

<sup>29</sup> See for example, Dale, *Harrods: the Store and the Legend*; Dale, *Harrods: a Palace in Knightsbridge*; Callery, *Harrods Knightsbridge*; Moss and Turton, *A Legend of Retailing*; David Wainwright, *The British Tradition: Simpson - a World of Style*, London: Quiller Press, 1996.

<sup>30</sup> John Benson and Laura Ugolini, ‘Historians and the Nation of Shopkeepers’ in John Benson and Laura Ugolini (eds.), *A Nation of Shopkeepers: Five Centuries of British Retailing*, London: I.B. Taurus, 2003, 3.



speed record, who was to open the building. However, the actual history of the store was distorted by the prominence ascribed to this event. The life of Simpsons started long before this moment; Simpson Ltd, the parent company supplying the store, already had a well-established reputation for quality men's outfitting and tailoring, which it distributed through its national network of agents. The transformation and reconfiguration of 202 Piccadilly itself had begun months earlier. In the preceding year, architectural plans were drawn up, the Royal Geological Museum building was demolished, and the processes of building, and frenetic negotiation over details, began. Energies, anxieties and excitement aroused by the Simpsons project reached a peak in April 1936, converging in the site on opening day. This was the moment when the store received more press coverage than at any subsequent moment in its history. The tension was heightened by Mr Simpson's insistence on opening only when in possession of the finished building. This was in variance with the common practice of construction existing alongside retail, which made particular sense as most new buildings were for existing retailers who did not want to lose custom and profits. This was the case with Peter Jones, which had opened floor by floor, as the builders finished. Mr Simpson's decision suggests that the image of the completed Modern building was central to the messages to be conveyed at opening.

The anxiety building up to the opening is apparent from the frequent correspondence between the store owner and architect in the previous months. Their anxiety was partly because every day of lost business was expensive in this prime plot, Alexander Simpson urging, 'it is ... important that I get in as much spring trade as possible.'<sup>31</sup> An ambitious building schedule was set. In February 1936 Simpson praised his architect's 'miraculous speed'<sup>32</sup> but by the 20th April, nine days before opening, Simpson was worried:

I went through the building yesterday evening and there appears to be such a lot still to be done. The finishing of the floors, odd bits of painting and decoration, carpets, furnishing, shopfitting and lighting, all seem to leave a lot to be done. All the shopfronts which on my last list were due for completion on the 19th to me seem to be a long way off.<sup>33</sup>

Two days later, the curved non-reflecting glass for the display window, which, as has been established, was a crucial feature of the store, had still not been installed.<sup>34</sup> Accounts record

<sup>31</sup> Letter from Alexander Simpson to Joseph Emberton 11 February 1936, Simpsons Archive

<sup>32</sup> Letter from Alexander Simpson to Joseph Emberton, 7 February 1936, Simpsons Archive.

<sup>33</sup> Letter from Alexander Simpson to Joseph Emberton 20 April 1936, Simpsons Archive.

<sup>34</sup> Letter from Alexander Simpson to Joseph Emberton 22 April 1936, Simpsons Archive.



Simpson pacing the building with frayed nerves during the few hours between work finishing and the opening. The time allotted to handover from workmen to salesmen was tight: work was supposed to be finished at midnight on the 28<sup>th</sup>, the store opened the next day. During this period, the owner stalked the store.<sup>35</sup> Simpson wrote to Emberton of his feelings on the brink of the opening, 'I rather envy you. Your job will have been completed and your great satisfaction obtained by April 29th. But on that same day I start out on this great adventure.'<sup>36</sup> This was clearly a moment when the control of the building shifted, and a new phase began. In this respect it is worth returning briefly to Alexander Simpson's liner analogy, 'I feel very much like the captain of a big new ship waiting for the pilot in charge of the tugs to get him out of the dock, so that I can sail spick and span on my maiden voyage.'<sup>37</sup>

[Figure 11.10] The opening was a carefully constructed publicity exercise, stage-managed in both the Piccadilly site, where a private view was held, and within the press, to ensure that the store retained control of the messages communicated by the event. The extensive coverage of the opening in the architectural press was actually concerned with the fleeting moment of handover, the store's interior emptied of workmen, staff and the public. In contrast, within the store on opening day, Mr Simpson made an effort to 'stage' a well-established retail business for a rather different audience. He had written to his friends and colleagues, including Emberton, to solicit between forty and fifty orders for tailor-made suits so that cutters and tailors on show at the opening had plenty of work with which to construct this image.

*Newspaper World* noted the extent to which the message was controlled at the press launch; a lavish affair, where members of the press were presented with detailed notes to shape their reports,

The extent to which the art of the publicity agent has been developed in recent years was demonstrated at the inaugural banquet of the new men's clothing store - Simpson's in Piccadilly - at Grosvenor House, Park Lane, on Wednesday evening. Practically every morning and evening newspaper in London was represented, along with not a few trade publications; and journalists were not only entertained simultaneously, but in addition were relieved entirely of the responsibility of doing any work.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> 'He was always there, at odd times during the 24 hour days which preceded the big bang of opening day. He wandered round, looking like a well-dressed visitor, but he had his eye on everything... He... smiled often, spoke quietly, asked many questions. He was always impeccably dressed.' Obituary of Alexander Simpson, *Advertiser's Weekly* 27 May 1937.

<sup>36</sup> Letter from Alexander Simpson to Joseph Emberton, 6 March 1936, Simpsons Archive.

<sup>37</sup> Letter from Alexander Simpson to Joseph Emberton, 20 April 1936, Simpsons Archive.

<sup>38</sup> *Newspaper World*, 2 May 1936.



Returning to Mr Simpson's missive sent to agents in 1935, it can clearly be read as a vision of the unveiling of the store, '... Imagine in the heart of London's West End, a vast new modern building, wholly devoted to a complete range of Simpson-tailored garments ... it will immediately invest the name of Simpson with an overwhelming first-class West End reputation.'<sup>39</sup> This letter can be read as a vision of the opening, in which key aspects of the store's identity, examined in detail elsewhere in the thesis, were publicised: modernity, men's tailoring, prestige and metropolitanism. Indeed Simpsons desire to open with a 'bang' was directly linked to the necessity of defining and legitimising a new kind of consumption: Peter Jones had not held an equivalent opening event, surely in part due to a confidence in the pre-existing store image and well-established customer base.

Unlike the opening advertisements of stores like Marks and Spencer discussed in Part II, Simpsons' advertisements stressed the image of the 'Simpsons man' rather than the architecture. However, the attention on the building in the opening celebrations staged in Piccadilly meant that a very architectural modernity provided the keynote for the event. To return to *The Scotsman*'s comment on the opening, '... the building is an expression in every way of the modern spirit.'<sup>40</sup> The masculinity of the store was also stressed within the spectacle, not least through the figure of Sir Malcolm Campbell who opened it. Simpsons wished to draw attention to its claims to be the first men's department store, and the *Evening Gazette* obliged, hailing it as 'a new bright spot in the lives of men.'<sup>41</sup> 'Exclusivity' provided the flavour of the event: Simpson was anxious to secure appropriate guests for his inaugural gala: 'I must make my arrangements for the opening and get the important people to book the date. It is impossible to ask men of public importance without giving them due notice.'<sup>42</sup> And although the architect was allowed to invite a few guests, he was urged, 'In giving me the names will you bear in mind that this will be a white tie affair...'.<sup>43</sup> Finally, the identity of the West End infused the proceedings: through the location of the events, the proliferation of the trademark 'Simpson Piccadilly', even the distinctively 'metropolitan' flavour of the tailoring and models of masculinity. Opening day thus marked an important moment in the history of the West End, central to this thesis, when a new model of metropolitan masculinity collided with cutting edge architectural design at 202 Piccadilly, drawing on the place's fashionable and elite

<sup>39</sup> 'Memorandum to all Simpson Customers', c.1935, Simpsons Archive.

<sup>40</sup> *The Scotsman*, 4 May 1936.

<sup>41</sup> *Evening Gazette*, 29 April 1936.

<sup>42</sup> Letter from Alexander Simpson to Joseph Emberton 11 February 1936, Simpsons Archive.

<sup>43</sup> Letter from Alexander Simpson to Joseph Emberton 11 March 1936, Simpsons Archive.



associations, but disrupting and reconfiguring established shopping routes and practices, as described in Part I.

The ephemeral nature of spectacle, theatre and pageant allowed for the negotiation of changing shopping cultures, in contrast to the relative permanence of the architecture that supported and housed it. The consumption cultures celebrated within these spectacles were themselves fragile and fleeting. Simpsons' identity, having been so carefully crafted and publicised at the opening, would soon see fundamental changes. Just as the history of department stores is littered with successive openings, so it is marked by closings: fires, bombs, bankruptcy, takeover and deaths of department store owning dynasties. Just over a year after Simpson Piccadilly's opening, young Alexander Simpson died suddenly. Customers, retailers and the public were left wondering, 'What would he have done?'<sup>44</sup> Although department store histories have perhaps placed too much emphasis on the nature of the owner, it was apparent that Mr Simpson's attitude towards business, retail methods and architecture was a significant factor in shaping this new building, and that his early death would have an important impact on the development of the store in the years that followed the opening. Within its first three years, Simpsons suffered not only a key death, but an influx of female customers, and the outbreak of war, all of which were largely unforeseen in April 1936, and dramatically shifted the store's identity. Each year on 29<sup>th</sup> April, the anniversary of the opening was commemorated in a window display, but as the years wore on, Simpson renegotiated its identity as the newest, most avant-garde building in Piccadilly, housing the most fashionable masculine shoppers, and started to appreciate the retail value of tradition.

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It is clear, then, that 'to look at the shops' was an important strand of 1930s consumption cultures and urban life. Shopping cultures had an established relationship with the spectacular by this time. What was distinctive was the way a deliberately theatrical rhetoric was built in to the new retail architecture of the 1930s West End, its windows designed to communicate in more effective and complex ways, its surfaces moulded to reflect light, to be adorned with signs, banners and flowers. The approach to the spectacle itself was overtly architectural; architects were involved ever more closely with the mechanics and the theories of display,

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<sup>44</sup> Obituary, *Advertisers Weekly*, 27 May 1937.



advertising and theatre. It was, above all, a spectacle that was located *in* the shopping street, engaging with the cultures that existed there.

Also distinctive were the specific shopping cultures that were being staged; window display spoke of gender and modernity, lighting was Modern, decorations and their associated pageants set out the identity of the West End, voicing a dialogue between the commercial and the cultural. Together, the theatre staged new consumer identities. The shift in the gendered nature of such identities helped transform the dominant image of the consumer as a woman, who was both seduced by and the object of spectacle, *because* she was a woman: the arrival of the new masculine consumer changed the gender-inflected meanings inherent in looking and desire, changed how spectacle was conceptualised and articulated. The female consumer, on the other hand, was now also a surveyor of scene; the protagonist of *Vogue's* shopping trips, sometimes looking at men in the shop windows as she passed.



# IV

## WEST END TYPES



## INTRODUCTION IV

This thesis has so far been principally concerned with the shopping environment: the store, the street and the city. Attention now turns to a figure that has been implicitly present throughout the preceding discussions of shopping routes, architecture and spectacular practices: the consumer. This study argues that traces of metropolitan consumer types can be identified in the West End's configurations, surfaces and spaces, but that they were reflected and constructed most explicitly in the visual and textual narratives of consumer culture: newspapers, women's magazines and store advertising.<sup>1</sup> These identities were shaped through relationships with gender, class, fashionability, modernity and, of course, shopping practices. Despite their physical removal from the site of the shopping street, the *place* of the West End remained central in the construction of the consumer types within these media: this West End home infused their features, their clothes and their shopping practices.

Part IV places 1930s consumer identities in context by examining the successive generations of consumer identities to be found within contemporary and historical accounts of modern consumer society. It then foregrounds two figures who inhabited narratives of the 1930s West End: the new masculine consumer at Simpsons<sup>2</sup> and the financially insecure *Vogue* reader addressed by the 'limited income' section of the magazine. The discussion of 'types' is

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<sup>1</sup> This draws on Jobling's analysis of Barthes' *The Fashion System*, in particularly his discussion of the magazine's verbal and visual codes of representation, and their readings. Paul Jobling, *Fashion Spreads: Words and Image in Fashion Photography since 1980*, Oxford: Berg, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Henceforth referred to as the 'Simpsons man' for convenience, although this term was not used by the store itself.



concerned with *representations* of consumers: there is no suggestion that the figures discussed constituted an exhaustive collection of consumer identities, neither were they necessarily a reflection of the average *real* shopper in the city's streets, a picture of which is beginning to be constructed in work elsewhere.<sup>3</sup> Rather, they were modern urban 'types', seen through the complex representational, aspirational and fantastical registers of window display, the text and image of the women's magazines and newspapers, and the spaces of the department store and shopping street. Part IV argues that these particular types are useful to the historian as they were especially resonant of the key aspects of 1930s shopping cultures examined in this thesis; they were also both indicators of significant change. The approach adopted involves reading these sources 'against the grain', revealing identities which accompanied and undercut more obviously dominant images of fashionable metropolitan consumers.

The term 'consumer identity' engenders confusion over the distinction between representation of shoppers and the real consumer's experience of a consuming 'self'. This corresponds to an identifiable muddling of the categories within 1930s society. Consumers and their representations were in constant dialogue, a dialogue that constituted an engagement with and negotiation of consumer culture, and fed a blurring between the 'real' and the 'unreal'. The confusion was compounded by the way stores, magazines, paper pattern companies and other institutions of consumer culture offered up models of identity as essential means with which to construct, or indeed purchase, the real self, a process suggested as each consumer's responsibility. Thus the reading of consumer identity in Part IV links with the concepts of the 'written' and 'imagined' city discussed in Part I, with the textual existence of architecture uncovered in Part II and with the relationship between mannequin and window-shopper outlined in Part III.

## A GENEALOGY OF URBAN CONSUMERS

The identification and definition of consumer identities has been an increasingly central component of consumption history and theory, reflecting a preoccupation with 'identity' in broader academic fields.<sup>4</sup> Studies of urban modernity have been important in this respect, with their focus on a modern concept of 'self', and use of modern types to signpost new urban

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<sup>3</sup> A good example is Horwood, *'Keeping Up Appearances'*.

<sup>4</sup> This new direction is discussed in Miller et al., *Shopping, Place and Identity*, Chapter 1.



cultures.<sup>5</sup> The prominent figures of the nineteenth-century *flâneur* and the rambler, already discussed in this thesis, are especially pertinent to this discussion. A proportion of these studies have examined the ‘types’ of nineteenth-century London. For example, Walkowitz’s late-Victorian London was peopled by figures who collectively spoke of the double-sided nature of modernity: ‘protesting workers and “gents” of marginal class position, female philanthropists and “platform women”, Salvation Army lasses and match girls, as well as glamorised “girls in business”’<sup>6</sup>. For her, these figures not only represented urban change, but were agents of it, ‘These new entrants to the urban scene produced new stories of the city that competed, intersected with, appropriated, and revised the dominant imaginative mappings of London.’<sup>7</sup>

Victorian London has also been shown to be the territory of *consumer* types: Rappaport’s newly confident female shoppers, establishing a foothold in the West End through their consumption and leisure practices; Breward’s fashionable male urbanites.<sup>8</sup> The emphasis on the consumer within studies of nineteenth-century consumption can be linked to the positioning of the rise of modern consumer culture within this period, as discussed earlier. Within this account, the consumer has been painted as a key protagonist, rather than the end-point in a chain of production and retail processes.<sup>9</sup> Historians have shown that from this time shops traded more obviously in ‘image’ as much as in more material commodities, an image that was bound up with modern consumer identities.<sup>10</sup>

In the aftermath of World War One, shifting concepts of class and gender made identities particularly slippery. The casting off of old boundaries could provoke anxieties, but it also offered exciting possibilities, not least in providing new ways of experiencing the West End. The consumer identities examined within Part IV were only two of a much broader community of 1930s West End types. Despite the vibrancy of the social lives accessed through the spoils of their consumption, the *Vogue* and Simpsons consumers usually negotiated the city’s shops alone. The solitariness of their shopping complicates consumption theorists’

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<sup>5</sup> See for example Breward, *Fashioning London*; Wilson, *The Sphinx in the City*. This treatment of identity can be seen to draw on the concerns of sociological work such as Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971 and Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Cambridge: Polity, 1991.

<sup>6</sup> Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, 18.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Breward *The Hidden Consumer*; Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*.

<sup>9</sup> This development is noted in Lury, *Consumer Culture*, 3.

<sup>10</sup> Ewen’s work is important in exploring this idea, although the phenomenon has been positioned at earlier dates by historians of the eighteenth century such as Walsh. Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976; Walsh, ‘The Newness of the Department Store’.



positioning of consumption as necessarily part of the formation of social and family relations.<sup>11</sup> However, there were others who traced different paths across the West End, with whom the ‘Simpsons man’ and *Vogue* reader of ‘limited income’ occasionally interacted, and from whom they differentiated themselves. These types included Alexander and Winship’s working-class and lower-middle-class female consumers, window-shopping in Oxford Street;<sup>12</sup> tourists navigating the tangle of streets with their guidebooks; business men, office girls and shop staff on their way to work; even shoplifters.<sup>13</sup> These were all figures who inhabited the same West End, who could eye the goods at Simpsons, or who might well be acquainted with the contents of *Vogue*.

The salesman and salesgirl were particularly important figures within this community, whose West End experience provides a useful context for the case studies in Part IV. They were the subject of much discussion in the proliferating professional retail texts, their hours and working conditions receiving the attention of the government in the form of successive Shop Acts in the period. They have also been prominent within popular fiction, theatre and film, from Zola’s *Au Bonheur des Dames* onwards, and have also caught the attention of historians.<sup>14</sup> [Figure 12.1] In the 1930s, ‘Sally the salesgirl’ of the *Daily Mail*’s advertisement could have worked in the Popular Café adjacent to Simpsons in Piccadilly. But for her, the West End was positioned within a different geography: it was a place of employment rather than leisure, and the destination of an early morning commute from more downmarket residential districts, or, if she was particularly well paid, from developments such as the Grampians in Shepherds Bush, mentioned in Part II.

For readers of *Home Chat* and *Woman*, this was offered as an accessible West End identity. Problem pages advised vulnerable salesgirls how to fend off unwelcome advances from their more powerful bosses,<sup>15</sup> and reported on retail schools that offered pupils the benefits of placements in the big West End stores.<sup>16</sup> Bowlby argues that the figure of the salesgirl turns on its head the equation of the Victorian department store’s modern consumer cultures with

<sup>11</sup> See for example Miller et al., *Shopping, Place and Identity*, Chapter 1.

<sup>12</sup> Alexander, ‘Becoming a Woman’; Winship, ‘Culture of Restraint’.

<sup>13</sup> The history of shoplifting is explored in Abelson, *When Ladies Go a-Thieving* and Spiekermann, ‘Theft and Thieves in German Department Stores’. Newspaper cuttings collected by John Lewis during the 1930s reveal that the female shoplifter remained a much discussed figure.

<sup>14</sup> See for example Susan Porter Benson, *Counter-Culture: Saleswomen, Managers, and Customers in American Department Stores, 1890 - 1940*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986 and the discussion of the shop-girl heroine in a West End show: ‘Our Miss Gibbs’ in Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*, Chapter 6.

<sup>15</sup> See for example *Woman*, 8 July 1939, 53.

<sup>16</sup> See for example *Home Chat*, 11 January 1930, 57.



democratised luxury, suggesting instead themes of exclusion and denial.<sup>17</sup> However, it is important to note Alexander's work on working-class and lower-middle-class women in the inter-war period, for whom occupations like shop work in fact provided *access* to consumer cultures.<sup>18</sup> For West End shop workers, this could mean immersion in the consumer cultures of the shopping streets, increased access to fashionable identities through exposure to the latest trends and also discounts on stock, hairdressing and beauty treatments. Work like this also provided the disposable income to facilitate the purchase of fashionable goods more cheaply elsewhere. It is worth noting that although the status of sales staff has frequently been written about in terms of social precariousness and ambiguity,<sup>19</sup> West End sales assistants had a particular reputation for superiority that suggested their confidence in this environment. An incident of rudeness was recounted in the *Drapers Record*: 'It is a thoroughly detestable way that some of the "young ladies"... have in quite a group of stores in London, chiefly West End. Why are not these half-educated people put sharply in their places by managements?'<sup>20</sup> Simpsons was furnished by tables and display units rather than counters, which reflected a similar attitude to the status of the salesman,

[a] dominant feature of the modern shop is the disappearance of the counter. ... In the old days the buyer was master, the salesman a servant who brought him what he asked for. The counter emphasised and perpetuated this division. Today the buyer consults the salesman, particularly in the choice of specialised goods. They must, therefore, not be brought into opposition by a dividing barrier; they must both stand side by side and look in the same direction.<sup>21</sup>

It was in relation to all of these 'others' that the *Vogue* and Simpson figures positioned themselves, distinguishing their own features from the rest in terms of their relationships with gender, class, modernity and place.

During the 1930s, store advertising, women's magazines and popular commentaries on urban life, such as Gaunt's *London Promenade*, all revealed a preoccupation with creating a typography of London's urban figures, in which consumer identities held a prominent place. Retailers, in particular, could not take their eye off the consumer. Their nascent understanding of consumer psychology, noted earlier in this thesis, was used to categorise shoppers into 'types', in an attempt to develop more effective niche marketing, with the key strategies of

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<sup>17</sup> Bowlby, *Just Looking*, 76-7.

<sup>18</sup> Alexander, 'Becoming a Woman'.

<sup>19</sup> This agenda was set out from the beginning in founding mythologies of the department store. See, for example, Emile Zola, *The Ladies' Paradise*, Oxford University Press, 1998.

<sup>20</sup> *Drapers Record*, 14 March 1936.

<sup>21</sup> *Industrial Arts* Summer 1936, 93.



window display and graphic advertising, which would exploit the desire of consumers to transform themselves. The retailer profession was also engaged in tracking the evolving consumer profile, in an attempt to predict retail trends in uncertain times. For example Lawrence Neal wrote in 1932, 'The purchasing power of the working classes [is] considerably increased ... This post-war trend has been accentuated by a very considerable shift in social habits... There has been less and less of the old-fashioned form of saving and ... consumer-spending in the aggregate, having many more wants to satisfy, has been taking place on a more generous scale.'<sup>22</sup> The trade journal *Store* believed that it was consumers who were leading retail changes rather than the consumption industries, and urged retailers to study their customers carefully for this reason. It painted consumers as increasingly invested in modern consumer cultures, and knowledgeable about shopping and commodities.<sup>23</sup> The efforts to accommodate the changing consumer by building flexibility into shops, described in Part II, was also a reflection of this. There were clearly many who had a vested interest in shaping the new consumers.

## CONSUMER IDENTITY AND STUDIES OF CONSUMPTION

Consumer identities and types have been valued by a broad range of historical and sociological studies for their embodiment of contemporary attitudes not only to consumption, but also to gender, class, modernity and the urban. There have been concerns that in this academic appropriation of consumer identity, the role of shopping itself has been obscured, as Miller et al. express: 'Commentators on consumption have rarely paid much attention to shopping. Even studies of department stores and shopping malls devote remarkably little attention to the cultural practices of shopping. Instead these practices are subsumed into a more general interest in an overarching activity called consumption. The shopper therefore nearly always figures as a sign for something else.'<sup>24</sup> There have also been criticisms that consumer identities have been interpreted as straightforwardly reflecting and being produced by shopping cultures, rather than allowing for them to be mutually constitutive.<sup>25</sup> Bowlby has commented that Baudrillard's pivotal but unfortunate contribution to consumption studies was to suggest that within modern consumer society, the self *was* the sum of consumption

<sup>22</sup> Lawrence E. Neal, *Retailing and the Public*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1932, 134.

<sup>23</sup> *Store*, February 1937, p.125.

<sup>24</sup> Miller et al., *Shopping, Place and Identity*, 7.

<sup>25</sup> Falk and Campbell *The Shopping Experience*, 3; Miller et al., *Shopping, Place and Identity*, 189; Frank Mort, 'Paths to Mass Consumption: Historical Perspectives' in Jackson et al., *Commercial Cultures: Economies, Practices, Spaces*, Oxford and New York: Berg, 2000.



practices and goods bought.<sup>26</sup> This has certainly been a theory with considerable purchase, but which subsequent studies have sought to redress, abandoning what are seen as overly homogenous definitions of the consumer in these generalised accounts in favour of more localised studies.

Whilst justified with regard to some sociological work, these criticisms undervalue the more specialised field of retail and shopping history. Although studies within this field have certainly charted broad societal shifts in gender identity, class structures, fashionability and modernity, they have also frequently maintained a close study of temporally and geographically specific shopping practices, and has considered the complexity of these elements within consumer identities.<sup>27</sup> This thesis aligns itself with such focused studies, approaching the figure of the consumer through a carefully integrated study of different aspects of 1930s West End shopping cultures.

## DEFINING THE CONSUMER: GENDER, CLASS, PLACE AND THE COMMODITY

This thesis has already established that gender is pivotal to an understanding of consumption cultures, and the study of gendered consumer identities has been a particularly important strand of both historical and contemporary studies. The dominance of the feminine consumer within this field is apparent.<sup>28</sup> Bowlby claims, ‘the history of shopping is largely a history of women, who have overwhelmingly been the principal shoppers both in reality and in the multifarious representations of shopping.’<sup>29</sup> This standpoint derives from the conceptualisation of shopping as a strongly gendered practice, by contemporaries as well as many historians. Shopping has been interpreted as an essential component of the female domestic role; as a masculine seduction of the feminine through strategies of temptation and spectacle;<sup>30</sup> and, more recently, as a more empowering, but still essentially feminine, means of engaging with urban life.<sup>31</sup> The imbalance has begun to be redressed in recent years, with important work on

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<sup>26</sup> Bowlby, *Just Looking*, 26.

<sup>27</sup> Breward, *The Hidden Consumer* and Rappaport *Shopping for Pleasure* have been particularly important in this respect.

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, Bowlby, *Just Looking*; Bowlby, *Carried Away*; Domosh, ‘The Feminised Retail Landscape’; Nava, ‘Modernity’s Disavowal’; Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*; Reekie, *Temptations*.

<sup>29</sup> Bowlby, *Carried Away*, 7.

<sup>30</sup> This account is stressed in Bowlby, *Just Looking*; Bowlby, *Carried Away*; Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness*; Reekie, *Temptations*.

<sup>31</sup> For example, Nava, ‘Modernity’s Disavowal’; Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*.



masculine consumers by Breward, Honeyman, Mort and Ugolini.<sup>32</sup> Their studies relate to a wider academic interest in masculine identity.<sup>33</sup> However, masculine and feminine consumer identities are still usually discussed separately, in line with their respective shopping cultures. Whilst promoting a new connectedness in the consideration of masculine and feminine consumer identities, this thesis retains a strong impression of gender differentiation. It focuses on two types inhabiting the same urban scene, not walking together, but engaging from time to time when their individual trajectories overlapped.

This research suggests that during the 1930s, shopping cultures were a particularly important arena for the construction, performance and contestation of gender identities. The aftermath of World War One was a time of significant shifts in gender definition, as Beddoe, Kingsley Kent and Light have argued.<sup>34</sup> Their research identifies an emasculation and feminisation of culture after the war,<sup>35</sup> and a corollary retreat to traditional and conservative gender roles. They describe the new femininity as overwhelmingly domestic in focus, rather than following the suffragist trajectory by making further claims on public life. This would go some way to explaining why the presence of women, and indeed the dominance of feminine cultures, in the inter-war West End was not apparently overly contentious: ultimately women's activities there could represent a non-threatening version of femininity, in which the shopping streets might be seen as an extension of the domestic sphere.

In a similar vein, Reekie maps a sexualised gender dynamic onto practices of selling and shopping, pointing to the objectification of female consumers through selling and advertising techniques which was the result of a post-war 'crisis in heterosexuality.'<sup>36</sup> Alexander reveals more positive transformations of ordinary women's roles in this period, which had a significant impact on their relationship with consumption. In addition to practical benefits ensuing from smaller families, better working conditions and greater prosperity, she stresses

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<sup>32</sup> Breward, *The Hidden Consumer*; Honeyman, 'Following Suit'; Mort and Thompson, 'Retailing, Community Culture and Masculinity'; Ugolini, 'Clothes and the Modern Man'; Ugolini, 'Ready-to-wear or Made-to measure?'; Laura Ugolini, 'Men, Masculinities and Menswear Advertising, c.1890-1914' in John Benson and Laura Ugolini (eds.), *A Nation of Shopkeepers: Five Centuries of British Retailing*, London: I.B. Taurus, 2003.

<sup>33</sup> See for example J. A. Mangan, and James Wilson (eds.), *Manliness and Morality: Middle-Class Masculinity in Britain and America 1800 – 1940*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987.

<sup>34</sup> Beddoe, Deirdre, *Back to Home and Duty: Women Between the Wars*, London: Pandora, 1989; Susan Kingsley Kent, *Making Peace: The Reconstruction of Gender in Inter-war Britain*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993; Light, *Forever England*. Roberts has also pointed the disruption of gender definitions in inter-war France. Mary Louise Roberts, *Civilization Without Sexes: Reconstructing Gender in Post-war France, 1917-1927*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

<sup>35</sup> 'The 1920's and 1930's saw a move away from formerly heroic and officially masculine public rhetorics of national destiny and from a dynamic and missionary view of the Victorian and Edwardian middle classes in 'Great Britain' to an Englishness at once less imperial and more inward-looking, more domestic and more private – and, in terms of pre-war standards, more "feminine".' Light, *Forever England*, 8.

<sup>36</sup> Reekie, *Temptations*, 173-4.



the importance of changes in aspirations:

Women in trade unions, education, local government, and feminist groups, as well as writers of fiction, were articulating women's wants and trying to persuade authorities to consider them, even if they refused to embody them. But most strikingly, advertising and the cinema, playing on fantasy and desire, enabled women to *imagine* an end to domestic drudgery and chronic want. Images of streamlined kitchens, effective cleaning equipment, cheap and pretty clothes and make-up, on hoardings and cinema screens and in the new women's magazines, added a new dimension to romance ...<sup>37</sup>

Part IV adapts this approach to a consideration of middle-class consumers, for whom the pleasures of consumer culture were even more accessible, and especially transformative. It does not find evidence of the retreat to conservative gender roles suggested by historians such as Reekie, who writes, 'Women were depicted in [department store] sales literature as passive, easily tempted, infinitely seducible and creatures of emotion and passion; men, on the other hand, were rational, logical and active.'<sup>38</sup> This study uncovers female consumers with considerably more confidence and more agency than Reekie would allow, negotiating between urban and domestic roles, whilst remaining aligned with mainstream consumer cultures. Her picture of a gender dichotomy is also challenged by the fact that in the 1930s West End, the 'Simpsons man' breached safe, traditional masculine roles, indulging in fashionable consumption as a leisure activity, complicating conceptions of this kind of shopping as feminine. Indeed, as other historians suggested, this was an era greatly preoccupied with defining masculinity, and these definitions were transforming significantly.<sup>39</sup> A retreat to traditional definitions was only one possible response.

Historians have stressed the essentially class-inflected nature of consumer identity. On one hand, the account of the rise of modern consumption cultures has been explained in terms of the expansion and increased cultural importance of the middle classes.<sup>40</sup> Michael Miller's work on the Parisian Bon Marché department store typifies this approach,

The department store was the creation of bourgeois culture, both capturing and threatening many things that culture stood for. The size and the precision and the ingenuity with which the enterprise worked sprang directly from values and impulses within the bourgeoisie, as did the consumer culture to which

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<sup>37</sup> Alexander, 'Becoming a Woman', 205.

<sup>38</sup> Reekie, *Temptations*, 176.

<sup>39</sup> A sense of shifting masculinities and resulting anxiety is conveyed collectively by the case studies in Mangan and Wilson (eds.), *Manliness and Morality*.

<sup>40</sup> The rise and significance of this group in Britain is described in Geoffrey Crossick, *The Lower Middle Class in Britain 1870 – 1914*, London: Croom Helm, 1977.



the department store gave birth. Because everything about it was so implicit in bourgeois drives and ambitions, the department store became a fundamental part of the bourgeoisie's world.<sup>41</sup>

Work on this subject has also often highlighted the anxieties provoked by the department store's perceived 'democratising effect' on luxury goods and fashions: owners of exclusive stores feared that their cachet was threatened, and there were broader concerns that social structures would be destabilised.<sup>42</sup>

Class has also figured in the historiography of consumption as an important determinant of how consumption was experienced.<sup>43</sup> In Part I, this thesis has already discussed the construction of class-differentiated shopping networks. Connectedly, class is key to understanding the nature of 1930s consumer identities. A significant factor in the construction of the new consumer types discussed in Part IV was that inter-war Britain witnessed a broadening of the middle class. It was understood as a larger, more established group compared with that of Rappaport's Victorian and Edwardian London. Light comments on the range of incomes and lifestyles encompassed, 'any use of the term must ideally stretch from the typist to the teacher, include the 'beautician' as well as the civil servant, the florist and the lady doctor, the library assistant and the suburban housewife'.<sup>44</sup> The group can be seen, however, to manifest a common investment in the new consumer culture, a characteristic that was paralleled in the perceived 'democratisation' of fashions in dress. The same fashionable consumption cultures were also increasingly appropriated by the more prosperous members of the working class, extending the boundaries still further. A significant proportion of the work on inter-war consumer culture has been concerned with the experiences of the lower income groups, where the most significant expansion occurred.<sup>45</sup> This includes Alexander's work on women's employment and relationship with consumerism, and Hackney's work on home dressmaking and the woman's magazine.<sup>46</sup> This thesis argues for the inclusion of more solidly middle-class consumer identities, the 'Simpsons man' and *Vogue* reader of 'limited income', in this discussion of 1930s society and its shopping cultures.

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<sup>41</sup> Miller, *The Bon Marche*, 237. Class is also given an explicit role in the account of the rise of modern shopping in Williams, *Dream Worlds*.

<sup>42</sup> See for example Lancaster, *The Department Store*; Miller, *The Bon Marche*; Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*.

<sup>43</sup> See for example the emphasis on class in Alexander, 'Becoming a Woman'; Breward *The Hidden Consumer*; Chris Breward, 'Patterns of Respectability', Barbara Burman, 'Made at Home by Clever Fingers: Home Dressmaking in Edwardian England' and Fiona Hackney 'Making Modern Women, Stitch by Stitch: Dressmaking and Women's Magazines in Britain 1919-39', in Barbara Burman (ed.), *The Culture of Sewing: Gender, Consumption and Home Dressmaking*, Oxford: Berg, 1999.

<sup>44</sup> Light, *Forever England*, 12.

<sup>45</sup> The expansion and consolidation of this already substantial group has been noted, as has its experience of relative prosperity despite the depression years. See, for example, Jackson, *The Middle Classes*.

<sup>46</sup> Hackney, 'Making Modern Women'.



Despite a shared culture of consumption, the broad middle class was far from homogenous. Between the sub-groups significant differences were variously maintained and challenged, in a display of equal anxiety over changing definitions of class as that found by studies of Victorian and Edwardian England. For example, Light and Humble's studies of conservative modernity in middlebrow women's fiction note how the marking of internal divisions was of great consequence to the upper half of the middle class.<sup>47</sup> Light commented, 'being "middle class" in fact depends on an extremely anxious production of endless discriminations between people who are constantly assessing each other's standing.'<sup>48</sup> The very existence of this anxiety implies that boundaries surrounding and within this broad middle-class group were unstable.<sup>49</sup> It is not the purpose of this thesis to accurately characterise the different stratifications within this group, but to note how the broadening and fluidity of class definitions in inter-war Britain allowed such types as the 'Simpsons man' and the *Vogue* reader of 'limited income' to come to the fore. They were ostensibly drawn from the same echelons as Light and Humble's 'conservatively modern', and both types expressed the possibilities and anxieties inherent in upward and downward social mobility, particularly in their efforts to balance an exclusive image with broadening access to West End consumer cultures. However, the types were simultaneously designed to appeal to a breadth of consumers. Their precise class positioning was therefore necessarily a little vague, allowing for the operation of fantasy, aspiration and desire.

Part IV is interested in the role of commodities themselves within consumer identity, in particularly fashionable clothing, a factor that has often been overlooked. This is ironic given that, as Falk and Campbell argue, it was modern consumers' focus of the attention on the commodity that distinguished them from the *flâneur*, who was more interested in watching both other people and the broader urban scene.<sup>50</sup> Miller et al. claim that the prioritising of the consumer over consumer goods has been a fundamental failing of consumption studies.<sup>51</sup> So far, this thesis has only obliquely addressed the matter of what West End shops actually sold: as the 'problem' fashionable feminine commodity within architectural discourse, and as the spectacular object displayed in the shop window.

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<sup>47</sup> Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel*; Light, *Forever England*.

<sup>48</sup> Light, *Forever England*, 13.

<sup>49</sup> Cary discusses the anxieties engendered by the perceived encroachment of the lower-middle classes in John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880 – 1939*, London: Faber and Faber, 1992.

<sup>50</sup> Falk and Campbell (eds.), *The Shopping Experience*, 7.

<sup>51</sup> Miller et al., *Shopping, Place and Identity*, 5.



Whilst a detailed analysis of West End commodities is beyond the scope of this study, an important aspect of Part IV is the integrated consideration of consumer identity and commodity: an exploration of how masculine and feminine consumer types were defined through the design and provenance of their clothes. This necessitates an acknowledgment of the cultural meaning of clothes, and draws on the development of social and cultural understandings of dress within fashion history. Studies in this field have uncovered complex meanings of dress beyond the straightforward expression of fashionability.<sup>52</sup> This study considers how new clothes were symbols of lifestyle, class and modernity. It also acknowledges how their histories as things that were ‘made’, ‘searched for’ and ‘bought’ infused their meaning, drawing on Lury’s cultural understanding of the nature of modern consumption processes: ‘The consumption that is referenced via consumer culture can, through the lens of material culture, be seen as *conversion*, or, more precisely, “the manner in which people convert things to ends of their own”.’<sup>53</sup> The study therefore takes account of what it meant for consumers to encounter and buy clothes within the carefully constructed environment of the real and imagined West End, building on the claims made in Part I for the role of geographies of shopping within commodity identity.

This renewed focus on the commodity within identity is tempered by an assessment of the ephemerality of the West End’s fashionable goods. The quickly changing shopping lists in *Vogue* suggest that the succession of the latest tweed tailor-mades, suede handbags and artificial-flower buttonholes were, if not irrelevant, then at least secondary to the commodity of fashionable femininity itself. Similarly, Simpsons prioritised the image of the ‘Simpsons man’ within its advertisements, the garments apparently subsumed in the construction of his likeness. Here it is worth returning to *Vogue*’s comment that ‘the shop sells atmosphere’:<sup>54</sup> this ‘atmosphere’ offered an exciting possibility to become someone new.

Nonetheless, the place of the West End remained hugely important within 1930s consumer identities. Indeed, place has become progressively more important in recent discussions of identities, as Miller et al. note, ‘theories of identity are increasingly articulated in relation to

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<sup>52</sup> These new directions are outlined in Christopher Breward, ‘Cultures, Identities, Histories: Fashioning a Cultural Approach to Dress,’ *Fashion Theory*, Volume 2 Issue 4, 1998; John Styles, ‘Dress in History: Reflections on a Contested Terrain’, *Fashion Theory*, Volume 2, Issue 4, 1998, 383-390; Lou Taylor, *Establishing Dress History*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004. One of the first integrated studies of fashion and gender was Caroline Evans and Minna Thornton, *Women & fashion: A New Look*, London: Quartet, 1989.

<sup>53</sup> Lury, *Consumer Culture*, 3. Lury quotes from M. Strathern, Foreword: ‘The Mirror of Technology’, R Silverstone and E Hirsch (eds.), *Consuming Technologies: Media and Information in Domestic Spaces*, London: Routledge, 1994, p.x.

<sup>54</sup> ‘A New London’, *Vogue*, August 5, 1936, 8-13.



particular spaces and places, both in the metaphorical sense of boundaries, domains and diasporas and also in relation to specific spaces and places.’<sup>55</sup> Rappaport and Breward have already made a case for the centrality of the West End within constructions of nineteenth-century consumer identities.<sup>56</sup> This thesis argues that the West End remained a key venue for constructions of middle-class identities within the shifting national shopping geographies of the 1930s. West End shopping streets and retail architecture were stages for the ‘Simpsons man’ and *Vogue* reader of ‘limited income’, who were the audience for and the participants in its spectacle.

### THE POWER OF THE CONSUMER

It is important to stress the possible fluidity, multiplicity and shifting nature of consumer identity. This relates to a current interest in the fracturing of identity, first seen as a symptom of postmodernism, but increasingly revealed as an important characteristic of modernity.<sup>57</sup> Whereas the image of the Simpsons consumer was clearly drawn by the store, *Vogue*’s consumers were considerably more fragmented, varied and diffuse, allowing for different interpretations. Less rigid definitions imply a greater confidence within the audience; the power to choose, negotiate and invent. Existence of particularly visible identities can signal the existence of their equal and opposite types, often to be found within the same constructing mechanisms: the advertising campaign and the magazine. [Figure 12.2] Simpsons’ fashionable consumer was explicitly positioned in relation to a scruffy, badly-dressed man in one series of advertisements. Similarly, in the shadow of *Vogue*’s affluent female shopper was the woman who struggled to follow the magazine’s fashion rules on a tight budget, and it is the latter identity that is explored in Chapter 14.

The relative power ascribed to particular types is crucial to this discussion. For example, Reekie has defined the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century female department store shopper as a sexualised pawn in the masculine department store owners’ power game, allowing relatively few possibilities for resistance, in the manner of Zola’s *Au Bonheur des Dames*.<sup>58</sup> On the other hand, Rappaport’s feminine West End consumer in the same period is

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<sup>55</sup> Miller et al., *Shopping, Place and Identity*, 20.

<sup>56</sup> Breward *The Hidden Consumer*; Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*.

<sup>57</sup> Discussed by Conekin, Mort and Waters in Mort and Waters, *Moments of Modernity*, introduction; Nava and O’Shea in Nava and O’Shea, *Modern Times*, 3.

<sup>58</sup> Reekie, *Temptations*.



shown confidently negotiating the paternalist rhetoric of Whiteley and Selfridge, and enjoying the experience of emancipated *flâneuse*.<sup>59</sup> Bowlby discusses the evolving attitudes towards consumer power within theories of consumption, and the associated shifts in the gendering of consumer identity:

In a remarkable rhetorical turnabout, the consumer has been elevated to a status of exemplary good sense in areas extending far beyond shopping itself, with the name implying not a situation of vulnerability or delusion but quite the contrary. The consumer has ceased to be a jellyishly susceptible mass, having become instead an individual endowed with rights of which, by implication, his or her previous incarnations had been deprived. ... Ceasing to be seen as passive, exploited and dim, the consumer has ceased to be seen as female.<sup>60</sup>

This change in attitude is generally seen as developing in response to the post-war consumer identities bred in self-service supermarkets, maturing during the late twentieth century, when consumers began to mobilise lobby groups and were endlessly consulted by market researchers. Bowlby and Rappaport both advise caution in applying current understandings of the consumer to studies of historical societies in a straightforward fashion, particularly with regard to issues of agency and victimisation.<sup>61</sup> However, the issue of agency, and the lack of it, is clearly pertinent to a discussion of 1930s consumer identities: the new masculine types associated with Simpsons were being ascribed the ‘feminised’ trait of susceptibility to manipulation by advertising and display, a characteristic which aroused considerably anxiety in the popular press. On the other hand, feminine consumers were repeatedly instructed on how to construct the consuming self, as if they were incapable of acting alone, whilst also being given unprecedented and un-chaperoned access to West End shopping.

Changes in consumer cultures were historically contentious; they augured modern times, where certainties about gender and class identity dissolved. Consumer types became a mechanism for the discussion of these anxieties and pleasures, shops a place for playing out tensions. Rappaport has described Victorian and Edwardian department stores as a ‘fault line’. They were sites of spectacular protest, at the centre of passionate Victorian and Edwardian debates about gender, class and the city. She describes, for example, the subjection of department store owner William Whiteley to traditional ‘rough music’ in the 1870s, partly in response to the way this new kind of retail blurred boundaries between public and private

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<sup>59</sup> Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*.

<sup>60</sup> Bowlby, *Carried Away*, 7.

<sup>61</sup> Bowlby, *Carried Away*, 7, Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*, 13.



models of femininity. Also described is the Suffragettes' night of shop window smashing in 1912, an incident that revealed the disruptive power of women in the city: women masquerading as window-shoppers turned into terrorists when the signal was given, playing on the confusion of class and gender definitions.<sup>62</sup>

But the tensions surrounding consumer identities could be subtler. This thesis has already described the expression of anxiety in the discourses on geography, architecture and spectacle. Chapter 13 examines the most worrying of the West End's shoppers: the inhabitant of the man's shop, who slipped dangerously into a world of femininity when he reconfigured his shopping geography and adopted new methods of buying clothes. Chapter 14 addresses a more muted anxiety. *Vogue's* construction of the feminine consumer of 'limited income' can certainly be seen as the provision of broader access to West End shopping. But it can also be interpreted as the magazine's attempt to retain the hegemony of its metropolitan consumption cultures, wilfully ignoring an alternative image of brash parvenus marching through Oxford Street in their cheap ready-made dresses, with no copy of *Vogue* in sight.

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<sup>62</sup> Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*, Chapter 1 and Epilogue.



## 13.

### THE ‘SIMPSONS MAN’: ‘ALWAYS BEAUTIFULLY GROOMED AND ALWAYS “ABOUT” ’

As noted in Part I, the outside world often characterised London as a masculine city. Gaunt’s *London Promenade* was a record of urban scenes and identities that were resonant of the age. Two of the book’s tableaux captured masculine types with close connections to the West End. Firstly Gaunt described a music hall bar on the night of the Boat Race,

The hearty set of Oxford and Cambridge (with one or two intruders perhaps, from Oxford Street and Cambridge Circus), of Sandhurst, Osborne, and Jermyn Street, greet one another like explorers meeting unexpectedly in some wild part of Africa. They exchange jokes with the barmaid in the ninetyish manner. And there are other and more modern young men, dressed all too beautifully, slim of waist and smooth of cheek, sleek and perfumed and with curled hair.<sup>1</sup>

Later, at the Long Bar, the ‘West End’ type was encountered,

Always beautifully groomed and always ‘about’. Bland and affable in manners and full of information as to the course of events within the mile around Piccadilly Circus of which he is the presiding genius. The many-eyed Argus of the clubs, and a sort of dapper mercury.<sup>2</sup>

Simpsons was positioned amongst the haunts of Gaunt’s young men, men who were defined

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<sup>1</sup> Gaunt, *London Promenade*, 6.

<sup>2</sup> Gaunt, *London Promenade*, 73.



by the West End and its fashionable masculine consumption cultures. The types embodied the tensions within these cultures between tradition and modernity, between the elite and the middle class, between masculinity and effeminacy. Gaunt's caricatures point to a new kind of urban consumer identity for men, an identity that was addressed, constructed and, most importantly, legitimised by the Simpsons project. This type was the most contentious new arrival within the West End of the 1930s. That the birthplace of this new identity should be at 202 Piccadilly was crucial: it was a place that allowed for dialogue with historical consumption patterns, because of its position on an intersection between old and new shopping routes, between the homes of traditional and modern fashionable English masculinity.

This chapter considers the nature of this new consumer identity, with a case study of the 'Simpsons man'. The figure was thrust into the public arena by the fanfares of the store opening and public debates the event engendered, making him a particularly visible and coherent urban type. He was depicted repeatedly in advertisements for the store, the designer's brief being to communicate 'image' above all else. A review of the initial advertising campaign reported, 'It has been almost exclusively a campaign of ideas ... The description and presentation of merchandise has been made secondary to the Simpson theme ... the smile of the Simpson young man has so far achieved the most lasting impression that the advertising has made.'<sup>3</sup> This type was also to be found in Moholy-Nagy's shop window displays, inhabiting the clothes on the rails, and the spaces of the store. Within these representations, clothes and lifestyle were used as mechanisms to construct his identity. The 'Simpsons man' was modern, urban and sporting, positioned in a particular way within the shifting class structure. He was defined by his Modernist home and by the relationship he had with fashion, consumption, leisure and the city. He was most definitely English, and was infused by cultures of the West End. However, the relaxed, confident manner of this modern West End habitué belied the anxieties he provoked about the transgression of class, gender and geographical boundaries, tensions which were housed in his Piccadilly home.

Masculine consumer identities, and indeed masculine fashionability, per se were of course not new arrivals within the West End. Work by Breward and Anderson has successfully questioned Flugel's theory that a 'Great Masculine Renunciation' of fashionability took place at the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>4</sup> They show that the nineteenth-century West End was an

<sup>3</sup> 'Simpson Advertising: A Campaign of Ideas', *Art and Industry*, June 1937, 245.

<sup>4</sup> Anderson, 'Fashioning the Gentleman'; Breward *The Hidden Consumer*; J. C. Flugel, *The Psychology of Clothes*, London: The Hogarth Press, 1930.



established arena of traditional elite masculine consumption and leisure, and also point to the social acceptability of men's fashionability and consumption within certain geographical and class boundaries at this time. Honeyman and Ugolini uncover a democratisation of these fashion cultures during the inter-war years, connected to the increasing availability of reasonably priced ready-to-wear tailoring.<sup>5</sup> This study builds on both of these strands, arguing for the new visibility and greater acceptance of mainstream fashionable masculine consumers within a different territory: the West End's principal shopping thoroughfares. The study also shows how the consumer profile on the one hand appealed to a broadly-defined middle-class, but on the other was still associated with metropolitan cultures of 'elite' fashionability. Most importantly, this new identity was increasingly defined by the new kinds of shopping practices; a new relationship with acquiring the clothes with which his image was pieced together.

### 'DAKS APPEAL': THE DRAW OF THE 'SIMPSON'S MAN'

In 1930, *Commercial Art* reviewed Austin Reed's graphic art:

Mr Purvis has seen that we English-men, on the whole, are an ugly, brainless, smug, self-satisfied-looking lot. At our most distinguished we look effete and over bred. He has therefore drawn men not as they are, but as they should be. Broad-shouldered, virile, splendid demigods. Men that could solve the unemployment problem. Men that could humble the champion of Atlanta, men that with one glance could overcome Mr Ghandi by turning him into a pillar of salt. Men that could make women advocates of polygamy. Mr Purvis makes one feel that by shopping at Austin Reed's one will not only improve the splendour of one's attire, but also increase one's stature.<sup>6</sup>

These comments make it clear that retailers' use of masculine consumer types as aspirational advertising was not only seen as an acceptable strategy, but that advertisements featuring these types were read and responded to by a 'knowing' audience, colouring a reading of the characteristics of this particular type within this chapter.

In addition to his physical characteristics, the 'Simpsons man' distinguished himself from his West End predecessors and provincial contemporaries using an established system of articulating identity through 'lifestyle'. For example, Ugolini has highlighted the continued

<sup>5</sup> Honeyman, 'Following Suit'; Ugolini, 'Ready-to-wear of Made-to measure?'; Ugolini, 'Clothes and the Modern Man'.

<sup>6</sup> *Commercial Art*, October 1930, 178.



exploitation by early twentieth-century retailers of traditional elite models of masculine lifestyle to promote their goods to middle-class markets.<sup>7</sup> She suggests that the aspirational value of this upper-class model clearly still had purchase despite the fact that, as Anderson and Breward have shown, the elite lifestyle connected to West End masculine fashionability had in reality long been compromised by the patronage of Savile Row by new moneyed and international groups in addition to the British aristocracy.<sup>8</sup> Simpsons carefully constructed a message about lifestyle not only through the garments on sale, but also through the tableaux of window displays, the setting of advertisements, and even in the structuring of departments. It was furthermore an important part of stocking policy to address 'lifestyle consumption'. Whilst planning the store, Mr Simpson wrote to his architect, 'We do know ... that in addition to the suitable tropical clothing we must also stock the type of furniture these people carry around with them.'<sup>9</sup>

The clothes and their context tied the 'Simpsons man' into a geography that ostensibly mirrored that of the *Vogue* woman, outlined in Part I. The details of his tailoring, lifestyle, and general demeanour characterised him as most definitely English, although he was frequently drawn to appeal to the all-important North American market. *Art and Industry* described the man in the advertisements as 'the Englishmen that foreigners see: those pleasant, carefree young men who may be the successors of Drake and Hawkins but who now meet the world with a smile.'<sup>10</sup>

[Figure 13.1] His identity was more precisely located in the West End. One of Simpsons' long-running series of advertisements featured 'Men about Town', which, like Austin Reed's contemporaneous 'Men about Regent Street' campaign,<sup>11</sup> indicated the centrality of West End shopping and metropolitan life to this type. The specific location of the store permeated the fabric of the garments, and the identity of their wearer. [Figure 13.2] For instance, the advertisement 'In town today...' depicted a young man dressed sharply in a double-breasted, pin-striped suit, complete with buttonhole, handkerchief, homberg and umbrella, accompanied by the text: 'The "man-about-town" air of this particularly smart suit is accentuated by the clean-cut worsted from which it has been tailored.'<sup>12</sup> This was an urban fashionability based on the business suit; interpreted both as a formal morning suit or smart lounge suit, an image

<sup>7</sup> Ugolini, 'Men, Masculinities and Menswear Advertising'.

<sup>8</sup> Anderson, 'Fashioning the Gentleman'; Breward *The Hidden Consumer*.

<sup>9</sup> Letter from Alexander Simpson to Joseph Emberton, 29 August 1935. Simpsons Archive.

<sup>10</sup> 'Simpson Advertising: A Campaign of Ideas', *Art and Industry*, June 1937, 245.

<sup>11</sup> This campaign is discussed in *Art and Industry*, March 1938, 85.

<sup>12</sup> Simpsons advertisement, 'In Town Today ... !', *Punch*, 6 May 1936.



suggesting work in a city office, but leisure in the West End's streets.

[Figure 13.3] However the 'Simpsons man' possessed quite a range of tailoring around this central piece, which mapped onto a broader territory of lifestyle. Ensembles such as dinner suits, full dress suits and hunting wear equipped him for the social calendar of the English elite: metropolitan soirees, days at Ascot and country weekends. He was also equipped to travel the world with his tropical suits. This suggested an international lifestyle that can be seen to draw on a prominent Victorian and Edwardian model of English masculinity involving imperial adventure, described by Mackenzie.<sup>13</sup> But it also related closely to the map of fashionable travel and tourism represented in *Vogue*, discussed in Part I. There was a clear message that the Simpsons shop in Piccadilly would equip the 'Simpsons man' for all the locations and events within this geography.

Despite this apparent alliance with traditional models of the English masculine wardrobe, the 'Simpsons man' was in fact distinctively modern. As discussed in Part II, the opening of Simpson Piccadilly marked a specific moment when Modernist design and modern masculinity converged within West End shopping practices. The store adopted a version of stylistic modernity that allowed for experimentation in gendered retail practice; enabling it to encompass tensions between exclusivity and democracy. [Figure 13.4] This modernity was also expressed in the garments, and gait, of the 'Simpsons man', structured in the design and tailoring workshops at Simpsons and drawn by the modern brush of Ashley Havinden. His casual off-duty 'Daks' slacks, worn with rolled-up sleeves, cigarette and nonchalant pose, encapsulated this West End figure's relaxed modern style which drew on new models of masculinity: the sporting hero and movie star.

[Figure 13.5] Age was also a significant factor in consumer identity. Because Simpsons had to generate a large amount of business, advertising needed to appeal to multiple age groups. Simpsons promoted its ability to fit a variety of customers according to their age and corresponding shape and fashionability. In an advertisement for overcoats, Simpsons differentiated the styles in this way, 'A man of thirty chooses the Piccadilly. When a man's forty he chooses the Carlton...'.<sup>14</sup> However, the overwhelmingly dominant image of the 'Simpsons man' was a youthful one. The 'man about town' seen in figure 13.1 was a typical

<sup>13</sup> John Mackenzie, 'The Imperial Pioneer and Hunter and the British Masculine Stereotype in Late Victorian and Edwardian Times', in Mangan, J.A. and Wilson, James (eds.), *Manliness and Morality: Middle-Class Masculinity in Britain and America 1800–1940*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987.

<sup>14</sup> *Evening News*, 19 October 1937.



example: he sported a garment that was ‘made to the younger man’s figure. That is to say, the shoulders, a touch wider than usual, have a little extra swagger; the sleeves are a little narrower; the whole jacket is amply cut in the chest, and slim in the hips.’<sup>15</sup>

The most important element of this young, modern image was the association with sport: it was no accident that the store was opened by Sir Malcolm Campbell, the British sporting hero. Clothing for outdoor sports featured prominently within his wardrobe: the afore-mentioned tropical suits, but also plus fours, golf suits, and riding clothes, which could be tried on with the aid of a dummy horse in the changing room.<sup>16</sup> Early advertisements described Simpsons as a ‘Sportsman’s Paradise’: ‘The sports shop at Simpsons does not merely glisten and gleam with equipment for every sport ... but is staffed by men who have been specially picked for a peculiar knowledge of their subject. Triple blues learn things here which they hardly knew before.’<sup>17</sup> For example, in 1938, the winter sports department was supervised by minor sporting celebrity Bill Bracken, the Olympic ski runner. Customers were invited to ‘discuss with him the merits of this pair of Norwegian skis, of that Kandahar binding...’<sup>18</sup>

[Figure 13.6] Work by Park, Walvin and Warren has examined the role of sport in Victorian and Edwardian models of masculinity; describing how sporting prowess variously became a symbol for moral authority, national and imperial power, and elite public schooling.<sup>19</sup> Indeed some of Simpsons’ sportswear advertisements were aligned with traditional English identities of this sort, particularly when directed at foreign markets. This was the case with the advertisement “‘untin’, fishin’, shootin’” placed in the *Canadian Pacific Gazette* and *Ocean Times*.<sup>20</sup> However, Simpsons’ sporting image usually ran contrary to this aristocratic, buttoned-up look. It was altogether more corporeal, associated with a more fashionable, modern and relaxed sporting body. [Figure 13.7] A typical advertisement for swimming trunks, ‘Down to the Sea in Slips’, showed a group of sleek, muscled, sun-tanned, bodies, ‘flashing like kingfishers into the more fashionable stretches of the ocean.’<sup>21</sup> [Figure 13.8] Advertisements such as ‘Daks Appeal’ suggest this image was linked to the role of sport

<sup>15</sup> Simpsons advertisement, ‘In Town Today...!’, *Punch*, 6 May 1936.

<sup>16</sup> Discussed in a letter from Alexander Simpson to Joseph Emberton, 29 August 1935, Simpsons Archive.

<sup>17</sup> Simpsons Advertisement, ‘Sportsman’s Paradise’, *Evening Standard*, 26 May 1936, 11.

<sup>18</sup> Simpsons Advertisement, ‘Bill Bracken is at...’, *Cook’s Handbook*, 1938-9, 87.

<sup>19</sup> Roberta Park, ‘Biological Thought, Athletics and the Formation of a “Man of Character” 1830-1900’, Allan Warren, ‘Popular Manliness: Baden-Powell, Scouting and the Development of Manly Character’ and James Walvin, ‘Symbols of Moral Superiority: Slavery, Sport and the Changing World Order 1800-1950’, in Mangan, J.A. and Wilson, James (eds.), *Manliness and Morality: Middle-Class Masculinity in Britain and America 1800 – 1940*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987.

<sup>20</sup> Simpsons Advertisement, “‘untin’, fishin’, shootin’”, *Canadian Pacific Gazette* and *Ocean Times*, July 1936.

<sup>21</sup> Simpsons Advertisement, ‘Down to the Sea in Slips’, *Evening News*, July 9, 1936.



within social life and sexual attractiveness, as much as it was to the physicality of sport. In this advertisement, a young woman gazed appreciatively at the Daks-clad body of her sailing companion. He was confident of his positive reception, as ‘when you get into Daks it’s impossible not to feel you’re cutting rather a good figure.’<sup>22</sup> This was a fashionability that related to new inter-war models of middle-class sporting sociability, described by Horwood.<sup>23</sup> But it also closely echoed the articles on the modern and very fashionable international society to be found lounging on St. Tropez beaches, which were so popular in 1930s *Vogue*.

### ‘SORRY I’M LATE...’: SHOPPING AND EFFEMINACY AT SIMPSONS

The ‘Simpsons man’ thus represented a highly desirable identity: good-looking, well-dressed, rich and modern. Self-consciously fashionable masculine consumers were of course not new, as Breward’s work has shown concerning the complex, fashion-conscious urban identities of the nineteenth century.<sup>24</sup> However, the 1930s ‘Simpsons man’ implied a more deeply problematic appropriation of feminine shopping practices and geographies, which distinguished him from his predecessors. In this respect, *Art and Industry* believed Simpsons had set itself a difficult task, ‘Most men are always on the point of going back and making the old ones do, and their buying mood is a delicate one. They must feel confident and unselfconscious if they are to reach the counter.’<sup>25</sup> This study suggests that the presentation of the ‘Simpsons man’ as a credible and attractive figure was actually a crucial tool, alongside the design of the retail environment and innovative selling methods discussed earlier, for legitimising the modern shopping practices needed to bring the cavernous spaces of the store to life. It was not an easy task: as noted in Chapter 12, this was a period of deep anxiety about gender definitions, which have yet to be adequately addressed by a detailed study of masculine emotionality in the period.<sup>26</sup>

Contemporary comment the new masculine consumer’s effeminacy certainly centred on shopping, and the cultures surrounding shopping, rather than fashionability per se. *The Manchester Guardian*’s review expressed the common view that the department store was a

<sup>22</sup> Simpsons Advertisement, ‘Daks Appeal’, *Punch*, May 11, 1938.

<sup>23</sup> Horwood, ‘Keeping Up Appearances’.

<sup>24</sup> Breward *The Hidden Consumer*.

<sup>25</sup> ‘Simpson Advertising: a campaign of ideas’, *Art and Industry*, June 1937, 245.

<sup>26</sup> This is contrasted with the breadth of work of feminine emotionality in Peter Stearns, ‘Men, boys and anger in American Society, 1860-1940’, in Mangan, J.A. and Wilson, James (eds.), *Manliness and Morality: Middle-Class Masculinity in Britain and America 1800 – 1940*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987, 75-91.



space for women,

Men, so rumour has it, dislike shopping. Even the most stout-hearted fellow flinches when it comes to entering a department store, while the majority of them entreat their wives, their mothers or their sisters to buy their gloves, their shirts, or collars for them. If that be so, is not the opening of a large store for men ... foredoomed to failure? ... the reason why men fight shy of shopping is that they feel that they are entering alien territory, from which they may not only be expressly excluded but to which they are only admitted on sufferance.<sup>27</sup>

[Figure 13.9] Simpsons sought tirelessly to re-brand this is a manly environment. The ‘Simpsons man’, despite his attractiveness to beautiful women, was usually shown in the company of other men: in a sports jacketed crowd at the races, or chatting at the Simpsons bar, as in the advertisement ‘What’s on for Weekends’.<sup>28</sup> Here, potential parallels exist with Turbin’s discussion of the ambiguous homoerotic content of American ‘Arrow Collar Man’ advertising,<sup>29</sup> however for the ‘Simpsons man’, male companions seemed to be a mechanism for bolstering, rather than unsettling, heterosexual masculinity. Charges of effeminacy arose rather from his shopping practices.

The ‘Simpsons man’ was also engaged in changing attitudes towards responsibility for clothes shopping. He was not a dandy, but was always well dressed, and had chosen the clothes himself. [Figure 13.10] There was a noticeable interest in this development through the 1930s, which can be identified in an advertisement for Lotus shoes of 1935, and equally in the *Evening Standard*’s article ‘Men in hunt for bargains. Chances for both sexes at the sales’ of 1930:

Interest in bargains is far from being a feminine prerogative. Hope Brothers, of Ludgate hill and Regent Street, tell good stories of the men who rush in hundreds during their luncheon time or after office hours to secure plain cashmere socks at 10½ d. a pair, sleeping suits at 4s. 10d., warm wool fleece dressing gowns for £1 and overcoats for 46s. 6d.<sup>30</sup>

On one hand, these items indicated a new acceptance of men’s interest in shopping. Their contemporary interest, however, lay in the continued perception of the essential femininity of modern shopping *cultures* as well as spaces. This view is put forward in *The Lady*’s review of

<sup>27</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 1 May 1936.

<sup>28</sup> Advertisement for Simpsons, ‘What’s on for Weekends’, *Daily Telegraph*, 3 June 1936, 6.

<sup>29</sup> Turbin, Carole, ‘Fashioning the American Man: The Arrow Collar Man, 1907-1931’, *Gender and History*, Vol.14, No.3 November 2002, 478-81.

<sup>30</sup> *Evening Standard*, 7 January 1930, 11.



Simpsons, 'It is amusing to find that the man's shop is designed and set out with all the allure of one devoted to women's luxuries.'<sup>31</sup> *The Lady's* identification of 'allure' is extremely significant. As this thesis has already suggested, the encouragement of browsing, impulse buying and window-shopping was central to this store's spatial organisation and approach to display. These practices were necessary to secure the multiple purchases required to support a store of this size, much larger than the West End's traditional masculine retail establishments. Mr Simpson wrote of his plans to encourage this kind of shopping,

I rather think it is a good idea that there should be small show cases in the barber shop, displaying goods that are on sale throughout the rest of the store: a pair of shoes, box of golf balls, an article or two from the gift shop, an unusual sports shirt, a hat, etc. ... I am sure it would give the customer an opportunity of discussing merchandise with the barber, and I believe we could train the barbers to interest customers generally in the store.<sup>32</sup>

Not everyone approved: the 'man in the street' reviewing Simpsons for *Art and Industry* was distinctly unhappy about the manipulative effect the interior displays and layout had had on him, 'I must admit that I felt like buying lots of other things. On the other hand ... I almost feel as if I'd been fooled into looking at all the other stuff.'<sup>33</sup> His unease hinted at the 'unmanliness' of being manipulated in this way.

Simpsons was also an important pioneer of shopping as an acceptable and pleasurable *leisure* pursuit for men. Not only could the customer shop comprehensively, shave and acquire sporting knowledge, the snack bar and club also provided the social venues equivalent to the tearooms and restaurants of Harrods and Selfridges frequented by their wives.<sup>34</sup> These additional components helped to position the shopping itself as leisure. It was no surprise, then, that the shop was described in the *Daily Mail* as 'nine-floors of store exclusively for men, where they can revel in all the delights of shopping'.<sup>35</sup> It was through this pleasurable revelling that the concerns about the effeminacy of this new identity were most frequently articulated. It was, however, also the mechanism used within Simpsons advertising to send up and thus legitimise the identities. [Figure 13.11] A significant series of early store advertisements with the catch-phrase 'Sorry I'm late – but look what I got at Simpsons!'

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<sup>31</sup> *The Lady*, 7 May 1936.

<sup>32</sup> Letter from Alexander Simpson to Mr Pearson, 1 January 1936. Simpsons Archive.

<sup>33</sup> Review of Simpsons, *Art and Industry*, July 1936, 23.

<sup>34</sup> Honeyman notes a similar development within the more down-market world of multiple tailors, 'An integral component of the multiple tailors' strategy ... was to attract the male consumer unaccustomed to shopping by constructing the shop as an egalitarian masculine sphere, but not necessarily one in which the act of consuming appeared to predominate', Honeyman, 'Following Suit', 436.

<sup>35</sup> *Daily Mail*, 30 April 1936.



explicitly used the previously ‘feminine’ language of desire and temptation:

When a man tells you he’s ‘just popping into Simpsons for a stud’ don’t expect to see him come popping out a minute later. For once a man is in Simpsons he is apt to lose all sense of time. Blame the wonderful barber’s shop if you like for tempting him to a shave. Blame the snack bar for having half his friends in it. Blame the aviation exhibition on the fifth floor for showing him a flying flea. Blame our shirts, our ties, our shoes – for bewildering him with choice. But don’t blame him: it’s not fair. After all, what man can tear himself away from Simpsons.<sup>36</sup>

Another advertisement from the series indicated that this ‘feminised’ consumer behaviour followed the ‘Simpsons man’ home, and altered his relationship with the purchased goods, ‘When husbands buy anything at Simpsons – don’t think that that’s just the end of the matter. Good gracious, no! You’ve got to *admire* the purchase. You’ve got to discuss it with him – in all the glowing terms that it deserves. He expects you to!’<sup>37</sup> However, the modern, attractive and essentially masculine image of the Simpsons shopper depicted in these advertisements undercut the ridiculing tone of the text, and reassured that his gender-definition was unimpaired. In one advertisement, a bathing-suit-clad ‘Simpsons man’ rushed to greet an admiring group of attractive young women at the lido,<sup>38</sup> in another he joined his wife in bed, sporting a newly purchased dressing gown.<sup>39</sup> That the conflict between image and text remained unresolved, however, is suggested by the continued anxiety of the store management over the threat posed to the store by female consumers, an anxiety apparent from the records of directors’ discussions throughout the thirties and forties, as discussed later.<sup>40</sup>

### SIMPSONS BESPOKE AND READY-TO-WEAR: ‘THE VERY CREAM OF ENGLISH CUT’

The ‘Simpsons man’ encompassed another key tension. The store needed to maintain a delicate balance between its cachet and the large volume of sales required: a new dilemma for this class of menswear retailing but a familiar issue for the department store. A group parallel to Breward’s fashionable nineteenth-century urbanites undoubtedly still existed in the 1930s West End, and studies by Horwood, Honeyman and Ugolini collectively point to an opening

<sup>36</sup> Simpsons Advertisement, ‘Sorry I’m late – but look what I got at Simpsons!’, *Evening Standard*, 6 May 1936.

<sup>37</sup> Simpsons Advertisement, ‘Sorry I’m late – but look what I got at Simpsons!’, *The Tatler*, 12 August 1936.

<sup>38</sup> Simpsons Advertisement, ‘Sorry I’m late – but look what I got at Simpsons!’, *Evening Standard*, 11 August 1936.

<sup>39</sup> Simpsons Advertisement, ‘Sorry I’m late – but look what I got at Simpsons!’, *The Tatler*, 12 August 1936.

<sup>40</sup> Board of Directors Minutes, Simpsons Archive.



up of fashionable consumption for men.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, this thesis certainly indicates that male consumers were now more numerous and visible in the West End. However, Simpsons' promotional campaigns suggest there was still considerable anxiety about the existence of enough sufficiently confident and sophisticated male consumers to fill the mammoth store.

The desire to convey exclusivity in terms of geographies and spectacle has already been discussed in preceding chapters. It was intended to pervade every corner of the shop, Mr Simpson informing Emberton: 'In the gift shop for women things like chocolates and perfume should be stocked and in the florist shop expensive fruit – peaches, strawberries etc'.<sup>42</sup> He eschewed retail practices which would threaten this image, such as seasonal sales and self-service, writing to the architect on the matter of store layout, 'With regard to your idea of ... a department of sundries around which a person can wander and pick up and buy, I am not very convinced that this is a good thing. It is, to my way of thinking, too casual. ... do not let us make a single sale in such a casual space.'<sup>43</sup>

The exclusive image was constantly under threat: the store's positioning, as we have seen, was deliberately intended to pull in passers-by. Whereas the Savile Row tailor had an unwritten door policy, anyone could enter a department store. There was, indeed, a conflicting desire to make the 'exclusive' West End image increasingly accessible. The new kind of man's shop, of which Simpsons and Austin Reed were exemplars, explicitly traded in identities. What set them apart from other menswear retailers was their claim to accelerate the transformation process that each new purchase offered. These shops claimed they could turn a customer into a type such as the 'Simpsons man' in the course of a *single* shopping trip, through the provision of good quality ready-to-wear tailoring, extensive ranges of outfitting, and the concentration of additional services in one place. A. Edward Hammond noted,

In one of these modern stores a man can arrive from the uttermost parts of the world, looking like a tramp, and, after a short while, leave with the air of a well-turned-out City man. He can have had a bath, a shave, and a manicure, and can have purchased everything from shoes to full-dress clothes, while a valet has pressed and sent home his old garments.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Breward *The Hidden Consumer*; Honeyman, 'Following Suit'; Horwood, 'Keeping Up Appearances'; Ugolini, 'Ready-to-Wear or Made-to-Measure?'; Ugolini, 'Clothes and the Modern Man'.

<sup>42</sup> Letter from Alexander Simpson to Joseph Emberton 2 September 1935, Simpsons Archive.

<sup>43</sup> Letter from Alexander Simpson to Joseph Emberton, c. May 1935. Simpsons Archive.

<sup>44</sup> A. Edward Hammond, (ed.) *Men's Wear Display: A Practical Work on Window Showmanship and Interior Planning and Equipment*, London: Caxton c.1930, 91 Austin Reed had already capitalised on the new provision of a variety of goods and services, running an advertising campaign with the slogan, '... Just a part of the Austin Reed service' during the early 1930s. It was possible to shave, bathe, buy tobacco, have suit pressed and so on at the Regent Street store.



It was necessary to increase sales through attracting customers with a broader class profile than that of the wealthy middle-class Simpsons men depicted in advertisements. Alexander Simpson publicly claimed that increasing the accessibility of 'elite' male fashionability was a personal goal, as well as a business strategy. One obituary noted, 'He had visions of conquering the West End trade in men's wear. He dreamed of owning a store where men would be able to obtain things that are normally only sought in the most exclusive and most expensive West End establishments at competitive prices.'<sup>45</sup> However, it was not the motivation for the policy, but its translation into promotional strategies that is of interest to this research.

Advertisements were placed in publications which spanned middle class audiences: ranging from the more select *Daily Telegraph*, *Tatler*, and *Punch*, to the less exclusive *Evening Standard* and *Evening News*, alongside special magazines for the passengers on luxury liners such as the *Ocean Times*. However, Simpsons was not aiming at a complete democratisation of this model of masculinity. The pricing structure, which was emphasised in advertisements, enabled the trade journal *The Outfitter* to place the customer base immediately as a cut above that of the multiple tailors, 'Suits, ready-to-wear from £5. 5s. to £10. 10s., bespoke from £8. 8s. to £18. 18s. Thus, it will be observed, a strict standard of quality will be maintained as the Simpson Piccadilly trading policy. Creating all the time in the minds of all visitors to London an "atmosphere" of real quality allied to the words "Simpson Piccadilly".'<sup>46</sup>

Research by Horwood, Turbin and Ugolini has argued that anxiety about social status was a powerful component of middle-class masculine dress codes in the inter-war period.<sup>47</sup> This view is supported by this study of Simpsons, whose advertising seemed to target a group who aspired to the metropolitan cultures of the 'Simpsons man', but who had been previously excluded from his wardrobe through their more precarious class status. A series of early store advertisements played on the insecurities of a series of men in socially aspirational positions, for example the architect represented in Figure 12.2. Another example featured a man, certainly not a 'Simpsons man', in an ill-fitting tweed jacket and trousers courting a smart, fashionable woman with a decidedly dissatisfied facial expression: 'A fine romance ... yes ...

<sup>45</sup> Obituary for Alexander Simpson, *Sunday Express*, 16 May 1937.

<sup>46</sup> *The Outfitter*, 2 May 1936.

<sup>47</sup> Horwood, 'Keeping Up Appearances'; Carole Turbin, 'Fashioning the American Man: The Arrow Collar Man, 1907-1931', *Gender and History*, Vol.14, No.3 November 2002, pp.478-8; Ugolini, 'Clothes and the Modern Man'; Ugolini, 'Ready-to-Wear or Made-to-Measure?'



but what a pity he doesn't get his clothes at ... Simpson, Piccadilly.' (Ellipses as in original)<sup>48</sup> It is significant that the aspirational models in this series were professionals such as solicitors and architects, rather than office clerks, shop staff and other lower-status groups within the West End who might also have aspired to the Simpsons man image.

Information on the correct way to dress was incorporated into store catalogues and advertisements.<sup>49</sup> A typical advertisement in the *Daily Mail* advised, 'what is most important to remember is that evening wear is either absolutely correct or it is nothing at all. These Simpson's tailored suits you may rely on to be right in every detail, the correct width of the lapel, for instance, in the double-breasted jacket, the way the front of the tail coat comes just below the waistcoat; and so forth through every other important detail.'<sup>50</sup> On one hand these advertisements were providing necessary tips for the uninitiated. On the other, they exploited anxieties about acceptance into traditional English elite circles. The latter was particularly apparent in advertisements directed at tourists and expatriates: 'however stoutly the Englishman may affect a careless indifference towards dress ... some of the worst predicaments in English life are associated with "the wrong clothes" ... The unforgivable sin is not doing the wrong thing, but doing it in the wrong clothes.'<sup>51</sup> [Figure 13.12] An advertisement placed in the SS Normandie's paper for passengers informed, 'The evening tail coat might well be included in the armorial bearing of England. It is not only a perfect symbol of the Englishman's far-famed formality – it exactly represents that something extra by which the Englishman sets the fashion for the world in the matter of clothes.'<sup>52</sup>

An important means of bridging the gap between the 'Simpsons man' and the consumer was the partial collapsing of the boundary between bespoke and ready-to-wear tailoring. On the shop's rails, and in the wardrobe of the 'Simpsons man', the made-to-measure suit rubbed shoulders with the ready-made. One advertisement featured two companions,

These two men have just taken lunch in the Simpson snack-bar (that bright haven of good foods and good drinks). But that is not the only reason they are feeling pleased with life. For both are wearing Simpson suits, an experience which in itself induces considerable pleasure. The younger man still cannot get over the fact that he bought this very excellent suit from us ready-made. In twenty minutes! Only costing 7 ½ guineas! The other is rejoicing that in Simpsons he has found a tailor who can dress a

<sup>48</sup> Simpsons advertisement, 'A fine romance...', *Evening News*, 21 June 1938.

<sup>49</sup> The discussion of this campaign was recorded in the Board of Directors Minutes, 17 February 1937. Simpsons Archive.

<sup>50</sup> Simpsons advertisement, *Daily Mail*, 4 November 1936.

<sup>51</sup> Simpsons Advertisement, "'untin', fishin', shootin'", *Canadian Pacific Gazette and Ocean Times*, July 1936.

<sup>52</sup> Simpsons Advertisement, 'Telling Tails', *L'Atlantique*, (SS Normandie) 22 August 1936.



middle aged gentleman of settled tastes in exactly the way he likes to be dressed. For 10 guineas!<sup>53</sup>

Multiples such as Austin Reed and Montague Burton also operated a policy of selling made-to-measure and ready-to-wear, as did a myriad of smaller, more downmarket established men's outfitters. Even in the most elite of English wardrobes, the bespoke would have existed alongside at least some ready-made items such as hats, collars, shirts, ties and underwear. However, it was the manner in which both kinds of suit were promoted at Simpsons that enabled the 'Simpsons man' to encompass tensions between tradition and modernity, the exclusive and the available, spanning youth and middle aged markets.

Ready-to-wear suits were of course not a new development, but their meaning and status was hotly contested during the inter-war years, due to shifts in systems of production and retailing, in masculine consumption practices and in conceptions of class. Honeyman has described the inter-war proliferation of the multiple tailors servicing the working and lower-middle class market, notably Montague Burton and Henry Price's Fifty Shilling Tailors.<sup>54</sup> As a representative of Austin Reed commented as early as 1930, 'ready-made clothing has developed from being a music hall joke to becoming the rational solution to the problem of clothes in an industrial world.'<sup>55</sup> Although historians have pointed to the continued social stigma attached to the wearing of these suits,<sup>56</sup> at Simpsons they were marketed as a sharp and modern, rather than as shoddy and ill-fitting, with apparent success. The company built a thriving business marketing ready-to-wear tailoring to a higher class of customer, raising its status within the hierarchy of masculine dress. It employed the supposedly stigmatised terms 'ready-made', 'ready-to-wear' and 'ready-tailored' prominently in its advertisements featuring the exclusive Simpsons image. The assault on traditions was two-fold: on one hand, ready-made suits were presented as acceptable in situations where previously only bespoke would do. On the other, they were infused with associations of the bespoke, hence providing the 'look' and cachet of elite West End tailoring for a smaller budget. *Art and Industry* summarised the success of the Simpsons image in these terms: 'It has reached young men who could scarcely afford the price which Simpsons charged for their clothes, and others who could easily afford a higher price but who preferred to buy from Simpsons.'<sup>57</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Simpsons advertisement, *The Observer* 1 November 1936.

<sup>54</sup> Honeyman, 'Following Suit'.

<sup>55</sup> A. Edward Hammond (ed.), *Men's Wear Display: A Practical Work on Window Showmanship and Interior Planning and Equipment*, London: Caxton c.1930, 91

<sup>56</sup> This is discussed in Horwood, 'Keeping Up Appearances' and Ugolini, 'Ready-to-wear or Made-to measure?'.

<sup>57</sup> 'Simpson Advertising: a campaign of ideas', *Art and Industry*, June 1937, 245.



*Art and Industry* also clearly felt this was a significant undertaking, given the entrenched system of categorisation of consumers by their clothing and shopping habits: ‘The Simpson advertising has not had an easy job, for men’s wear has never been easy to sell. Wealthy men used to choose their tailors, shirtmakers and hatters in the way that they used to choose schools for their sons. It was a traditional practice. Lesser men used to buy where they could afford to buy.’<sup>58</sup> To collapse this important distinction was also a risky venture in an age when historians have suggested men were still preoccupied with maintaining class differentiation through the minutiae of dress detailing. Honeyman has described, for example, how multiple tailors’ attempts to democratise the suit were inevitably matched by the upper end of the market’s attempts to distinguish itself and its suits.<sup>59</sup>

However, the Simpsons project indicates that West End menswear retail in the 1930’s was not clearly divided between the modern and the traditional. There was not a clear-cut picture of an increasingly besieged bastion of old-style elite tailoring, backward in retail and production techniques, contrasted with cheap new ready-to-wear, sold in modern surroundings using modern methods. The modernity of Simpsons has been discussed at length in preceding chapters, but it has also been noted that the store was positioned carefully between old and new worlds of retailing, creating an intersection between Jermyn Street and Savile Row. This relationship was also negotiated through the garments of the ‘Simpsons man’; their production, pricing, and how they coded the spaces of the store.

The questions of whether the coexistence of bespoke and ready-to-wear at Simpsons was problematic, whether the two types of garments served different customers; and whether the boundaries between them were clearly defined, can be explored through the organisation of retail space. Within the store’s carefully planned layout, it was not tailoring but hats and ‘outfitting’ items, such as shirts, pyjamas and hosiery, that were allotted the coveted ground floor, with the barber, bar and restaurant, cigar shop, ticket bureau and gift shop in the basement. Ready-made suits and overcoats were on the first and second floors, sportswear and tropical kit on the third. Bespoke tailoring was pushed up to the fourth floor, which it shared with ready-made dress and formal clothes, beneath the special exhibition space for aeroplanes and the like on the fifth.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Honeyman, ‘Following Suit’. See also Turbin, ‘Fashioning the American Man’.

<sup>60</sup> ‘Design of a Modern Shop’, *Industrial Arts*, Summer 1936, 93.



From the outset, Mr Simpson planned for a remarkably extensive stock of ready-made tailoring to be on-site. In a detailed letter to his architect, he specified space for a minimum of 10, 000 lounge suits, 1,500 to 3,000 overcoats (depending on the season), 800 raincoats, 600 dinner suits, 700 full dress suits, 120 dress overcoats, 400 morning coats and vests, 600 black jackets and waistcoats, 1,000 striped trousers, 100 wedding vests, to say nothing of the sports and tropical wear.<sup>61</sup> When Simpson Piccadilly opened, Simpson Ltd, which had started out as a bespoke tailoring firm, had an established reputation for the manufacture of good quality ready-made suits for men, and also for their branded ‘daks’ trousers.

However, it would be wrong to suggest that the ‘bespoke’ was unimportant at Simpsons, indeed the ‘Savile Row’ theme pervaded the whole store and its advertising. Part II described how the store had been tailored to fit the Simpsons clothing range, and *The Outfitter* noted how the building conveyed a culture of the bespoke, ‘large as the building is, the individual attention devoted to each floor from the point of view of correct “atmosphere” ensures intimacy for each customer.’<sup>62</sup> The making process was prominently housed in the building. Mr Simpson boasted, ‘We are employing only first-class Savile Row cutters, and our suits at 12 and 14 guineas are hand-made on the premises.’<sup>63</sup> On the fourth floor, the bespoke department was carefully positioned at the Jermyn Street end of the building, and tailors and cutters could be seen working on bespoke orders behind a glass screen.<sup>64</sup> Indeed, Mr Simpson had personally drummed up fifty orders of bespoke suits prior to opening, including one from the architect, so tailors and cutters could be observed hard at work on opening day,<sup>65</sup> in a display that certainly caught the eye of *Industrial Arts*’s reviewer.<sup>66</sup> This feature can be interpreted in terms of the tourism of work, discussed by historians such as MacCannell.<sup>67</sup> However, it might be better understood as a deliberate attempt to associate the store with a Savile Row image, despite the fact that the store’s display tailors were, in actuality, an outpost of the much larger tailoring room at Simpson Ltd’s manufacturing base in Stoke Newington.

This thesis argues that this pervasive culture of the ‘bespoke’ also attached itself to the ready-

<sup>61</sup> Letter from Alexander Simpson to Joseph Emberton, 29 August 1935, Simpsons Archive.

<sup>62</sup> *The Outfitter*.

<sup>63</sup> Letter from Alexander Simpson to Joseph Emberton, 16 April 1936, Simpsons Archive.

<sup>64</sup> Plans for this were discussed in a letter from Alexander Simpson to Mr Hollister of Simpson Ltd., Stoke Newington, 11 September 1935, Simpson Archive.

<sup>65</sup> Letter from Alexander Simpson to Joseph Emberton, 16 April 1936, Simpsons Archive.

<sup>66</sup> ‘Design of a Modern Shop’, *Industrial Arts*, Summer 1936, 93

<sup>67</sup> See for example, Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.



made lines, through a stress laid on the quality of fabric, on the range of styles, but most importantly on the cut and fit of the ready-made lines. An advertisement placed in a North American trade magazine played on this theme, ‘Sell authentic English coats and sports jackets – identical with those on view this season at Simpson Piccadilly, the smartest man’s shop in London. Made in traditional British Tweeds, incomparable for beauty, softness and long-wear. Created by Simpson, the leading fashion tailors – who have three generations of tailoring craft behind them. In Simpson clothes you have the very cream of English cut.’<sup>68</sup>

Cut and fit were so important in the promotion of ready-made tailoring due to the stigma attached to ill-fitting suits. Whereas Ugolini has noted that ready-mades retained this reputation in the inter-war years due to most retailers’ reluctance to carry the range of stock required to fit any customer<sup>69</sup>, the scale of Simpsons and its substantial manufacturing wing enabled it to make important inroads. [Figure 13.13] An advertisement in the *Evening Standard* addressed this issue directly through its depiction of a range of body types. The text of another advertisement expanded the point:

‘Impossible!’ they said ... ‘You can’t get clothes ready-made when you’re six feet two!’ said one, ‘You’ll never fit me, my shoulders are too broad’, said the next. ‘Tailors tell me I’ve got a difficult figure,’ said a third, ‘My legs are far too long for a ready-made suit’ said a fourth ... Yet as these untouched snaps show – we fitted them all at sight for 6gns.’ ... We’ve spent many years in charting the human figure in all its variations. We have evolved 132 fittings – which cover every type, except of course, the abnormal.<sup>70</sup>

[Figure 13.14] The extensive ranges also enabled a variety of fabric that replicated the choosing processes that took place in a traditional tailor’s. For instance, one advertisement offered a single overcoat in scotch ulstering, scotch curl, blended cheviot and saxony, camel and cashmere mixture, pure camel hair or pure cashmere curl.<sup>71</sup>

This fuzziness of distinctions is significant, and certainly challenges any suggestion of a separation of bespoke and ready-to-wear along class lines. At Simpsons, the same models were available made-to-measure or ready-made, at two different tariffs. The implication was that they were made in essentially the same way, but the ready-made version was produced in advance. In any case, during the 1930s, ready-made suits were often altered to fit more closely

<sup>68</sup> Simpsons advertisement, ‘Fashions from England’ *Style for Men*, May 1940.

<sup>69</sup> Ugolini, ‘Ready to Wear or Made to Measure?’

<sup>70</sup> Simpsons advertisement, *Evening News* 9 March 1937.

<sup>71</sup> Simpsons advertisement ‘You can choose this coat in ...’, *Evening News*, 1 November 1937.



by the retailer, and a sizeable alterations department existed at Simpsons further closing the gap.<sup>72</sup>

To approach the relationship between bespoke and ready-to-wear from a different angle, Ugolini has made the important point that despite its undoubted growth, at this time the ready-to-wear suit was not necessarily recognised as representing the unchallenged future of tailoring.<sup>73</sup> At Simpsons, bespoke was not promoted as the old-fashioned option. One advert boasted ‘Simpsons are more than tailors with a long repute and tradition. They make their clothes in fine modern workrooms expertly staffed and scientifically planned for quick delivery.’<sup>74</sup> Elsewhere, the quality of the Simpsons bespoke suit was ascribed to their modern ‘scientific foundations’ alongside the skills of ‘cutters of longstanding West End experience’.<sup>75</sup> This study reveals that the Simpsons man’s relationship with modernity, masculinity, class and fashionability was mediated through his clothes in a much more complex way than might initially be assumed, providing a comment on the interrelated meanings of men’s clothing production and retail at this time.

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Chapter 13 suggests that new masculine identities were increasingly articulated through consumer types, such as the ‘Simpsons man’, who were defined by the new kinds of shopping practices described in this thesis. This is in line with Turbin’s conclusion about contemporaneous American models of masculinity.<sup>76</sup> But whilst Turbin suggests a corresponding move away from definitions based on ‘moral character’, this study finds echoes of these concerns in the way dress and consumption continued to be used in this period to debate issues of effeminacy and class. It is clear that how the ‘Simpsons man’ shopped and what he shopped *for* were intricately connected, and that tensions between modern and traditional men’s retailing were mirrored in the complex relationship between the ready-made and the bespoke in the type’s wardrobe.

Existing studies of inter-war masculine consumption have tended to highlight themes of correct and appropriate dress: the unwritten codes and regulations within complex class-

<sup>72</sup> Letter from Alexander Simpson to Joseph Emberton, 20 May 1935. Simpsons Archive.

<sup>73</sup> Ugolini, ‘Ready-to-Wear or Made-to-Measure?’

<sup>74</sup> Simpsons advertisement, ‘I’m not clear about this Sam-Browne business’ c.1940, Simpsons Archive.

<sup>75</sup> Simpsons advertisement, ‘A Scientific Foundation’, *Evening Standard*, 13 September 1937.

<sup>76</sup> Turbin, ‘Fashioning the American Man’, 472.



inflected fashionabilities.<sup>77</sup> However a study of the ‘Simpsons man’ allows for an alternative model, where boundaries of class and gender were transgressed (albeit within safe limits), traditional dress codes challenged, and shopping could be experienced as a pleasure as well as a source of anxiety. In this sense the Simpsons man was heir to the cultures of Breward’s West End urbanites of the 1890s. He was, of course, a type constructed by a retailer, not an actual shopper. However, the high profile of the Simpsons advertising campaign, and the association with the show-stopping new Modern building and novel displays, meant that he was highly visible, and was always cast as one to watch for the future. The success of the advertising suggested he embodied trends within masculine consumption that were both recognisable and desirable. He was thus partly responsible for the inclusion of prominent and extensive menswear departments in newly rebuilt Modern department stores in the West End such as Oxford Street’s D. H. Evans. His contribution to the flavour of the West End was decisive.

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<sup>77</sup> Turbin, ‘Fashioning the American Man’, 472; Ugolini, ‘Clothes and the Modern Man’; Ugolini, ‘Ready-to-Wear or Made-to-Measure?’



## 14.

### WOMEN OF 'LIMITED INCOME'

The shopping geography of *Vogue*, tracked in Part I, was constructed through lifestyle articles, fashion features, shopping columns and advertisements. [Figure 14.1] It related to an image of a well-heeled, fashionable and urbane consumer, clothed in good-quality designer outfits and ready-mades from West End department stores or exclusive little shops, exemplified by *Vogue*'s 'cover girls'. However, it was also noted that alternative shopping geographies could be traced through *Vogue*: bargains could be snapped up in the back streets and dressmakers commissioned in the upper stories. This chapter revisits these possibilities for resisting the magazine's dominant message about expensive feminine consumption, drawing attention to alternative models of femininity woven into the magazine's own pages.

It examines one particular model: a fashionable *Vogue*-reading consumer who was less well off than her more prominent counterpart. This was a model deliberately constructed by *Vogue*'s editors, although less explicitly than either the dominant model of femininity within *Vogue* or Havinden's depiction of the 'Simpsons man'. [Figure 14.2] In 1930, *Vogue* introduced a substantial new section for women of 'limited income', slotted in behind the more high profile contents. Although ready-to-wear garments were a component of this section, including a regular 'bargain of the fortnight' outfit, a substantial proportion of its pages was devoted to home dressmaking. The 'limited income' section therefore seemingly undercut the version of feminine consumer identity painted at the front of the magazine, on which the magazine had built its reputation. However, a closer study of the contents of this



section reveals that the profile of the consumer constructed here did *not* differ significantly from the more dominant model in terms of age, class, working or marital status: there was simply a discrepancy of income. Importantly, the section was aimed at those who shared an investment in the fashionable West End consumer cultures of *Vogue*, but had to utilise a multitude of tricks and feints to achieve the same 'look' and illusion of lifestyle. When *Vogue* set out the agenda of its new section, it made it clear that it was about maintaining expectations of fashionability, by '[making] every shilling do the work of two':<sup>1</sup>

A large number of the latest Vogue Patterns ... The latest fabrics and where to buy them. Nowadays half the chic of a new fashion is in its fabric. Inexpensive models from the shops that yet have the stamp of good taste. Little ingenuities in dress and short cuts to chic – ideas that you can carry out for yourself. How to balance your dress budget however tiny ... The right and wrong of dress – to save you those expensive experiments...<sup>2</sup>

This section is significant because it clearly suggests a broader base for *Vogue's* fashion cultures than is immediately apparent. This was achieved through a renegotiated, but still pivotal, relationship with the metropolitan: implying that a 'day in town' was only one way of participating. It also involved resituating the making of consumer identity to a position within the fashion system that was midway between consumption and production. Home dressmaking had always been an element of *Vogue*, the magazine allied, in the tradition of many women's magazines, to a successful paper pattern company. But in the inter-war years, the magazine made a more explicit alliance between its home dressmaking coverage and the newly visible, less well-off consumer, suggesting that the magazine was responding to the broadening of access to middle-class consumer cultures outlined in Chapter 12. The Shop-hound column discussed in Part I sat at the junction of the main features and the 'limited income' section. Read with this positioning in mind, it can be seen to work on another level, addressing *Vogue's* hidden consumer: the woman of 'limited income'.

### 'DON'T DO WITHOUT US A MOMENT LONGER': RECONSTRUCTING THE SHOPPER IN *VOGUE*

Women's magazines are rich hunting grounds for consumer identities. Historians have positioned the magazine prominently within accounts of the rise of modern consumer cultures,

<sup>1</sup> *Vogue* 5 March 1930, 37.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.



establishing a connection between three late nineteenth-century developments: the expansion of the women's periodical press, the rise of new forms of feminine consumption associated with the department store, and the interpretation of shopping as a major component of feminine identity.<sup>3</sup> This longstanding cultural and economic relationship between the magazine, shopping and feminine identity was, if anything, strengthened in the inter-war years, as consumer society, its media and institutions matured.<sup>4</sup>

[Figure 14.3] This close relationship worked on many levels. Magazines were, of course, commodities in their own right: they were objects which were desired, bought and treasured; important accessories to a fashionable feminine identity.<sup>5</sup> As such, they should be placed together with the garments, shops, advertisements, hatboxes, train tickets and so on that constituted the material culture of feminine consumption. But magazines were also narratives about society, reflecting Beetham's notion that 'The magazine as "text" interacts with the culture which produced it and which it produces. It is a place where meanings are contested and made.'<sup>6</sup> That studies of these 'texts' should have frequently interpreted the magazine as producer, rather than reflector, of feminine identities, is an expected consequence of the way women's magazines had, throughout their history, set themselves up as manuals of ideal femininity. In their pages 'femininity' was regularly updated and reworked as successive issues were published. This has led Ferguson to liken the magazine to a sacred tome of a religious cult.<sup>7</sup> Beetham suggests that the magazine's preoccupation with constructing ideal femininity, treating it as 'simultaneously assumed as given and as still to be achieved', reflected society's deep anxiety about the female role.<sup>8</sup>

This study concurs to some extent with this interpretation. [Figure 14.4] *Vogue* certainly positioned itself explicitly as a manual of consumption, effectively constructing ideal consumers to serve as models for readers through text and image. The high value placed on 'expert knowledges', of the sort found in magazines like *Vogue*, has been identified by Lury and Conekin et al. as a defining feature of post-war modern consumer culture, seeing in it an 'increasingly *reflexive* relation to self-identity' which 'can be understood in terms of a

<sup>3</sup> See for example Beetham, *A Magazine of her own?*; Barbara Burman (ed.), *The Culture of Sewing: Gender, Consumption and Home Dressmaking*, Oxford: Berg, 1999, Nava, 'Modernity's Disavowal', 45; Richard Ohmann, *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets and Class at the turn of the Century*, London: Verso, 1996, and Scanlon, *Inarticulate Longings*.

<sup>4</sup> The huge growth in this period of women's magazines is described by Hackney, 'Making Modern Women', 74-5.

<sup>5</sup> This point is discussed in Beetham, *A Magazine of her own?*, 9-10; Bowlby, *Just Looking*, 8.

<sup>6</sup> Beetham, *A Magazine of her own?* 5.

<sup>7</sup> Marjorie Ferguson, *Forever Feminine: Women's Magazines and the Cult of Femininity*, London: Heinemann, 1983.

<sup>8</sup> Beetham, *A Magazine of her own?*, 1.



reflection upon the process of self-fashioning'.<sup>9</sup> However, it is clear from a study of the 1930s that the prominence of this kind of expert in women's magazines can be situated long before the post-war years. Zweiniger-Bargielowska has shown that the institutions of mass consumer culture promoted a preoccupation with perfect female bodies during the inter-war years,<sup>10</sup> and important parallels can be seen to exist between magazines' instruction on attaining the ideal physical self, and desirable consumer identity through the acquisition of goods. *Vogue* marketed itself as an essential shopping tool, providing detailed and constantly updated information about fashionable consumption. An advertisement for *Vogue* subscriptions evoked the magazine's contents as a veritable recipe for femininity,

The woman who studies *Vogue* regularly gets all the information there is about colours, materials, lines, accessories, ensembles. She acquires an underlying clothes sense which teaches her what to buy and what to avoid. She learns to know herself – her good points, her limitations... She acquires a hundred little tricks of how to plan, how to combine – tricks of wearing clothes she already has, so that they appear new, of dating them forward by means of the latest accessories. She finds addresses of little shops where individual things are made, and hears of special values in the big stores which she would otherwise have overlooked... She spends a penny a day on *Vogue*, and makes her dress allowance go twice as far as it would without *Vogue*'s regular counsel.<sup>11</sup>

There was a clear subtext that successful shopping would enable the reader to achieve ideal femininity.

It was difficult to avoid images of the ideal female consumer within *Vogue*, and she was often defined by her shopping practices: her behaviour, her purchases and even her dress. [Figure 14.5] In an advertisement for 'Lux' soap, a shopper was depicted interrogating a sales assistant in a drapery department with pertinent questions about the qualities of a plaid fabric: 'Is it fashionable? Will it go with my new coat? Will he like it? Will it wash?'<sup>12</sup> [Figure 14.6] In one fashion feature the consumer was dressed with care whilst 'sweet shopping at Selfridges': 'The shopper seen here, wandering fascinated among the gay packages, wears a brown and natural colour double-breasted tweed coat with a belt at the back only and a brown collar. The detachable cape, fitted snugly to the shoulders, swings hip-length. 8½ guineas [from] Selfridges.'<sup>13</sup> Similarly, the Shop-hound columns, as well as constituting maps to the West

<sup>9</sup> Conekin, Mort and Waters, *Moments of Modernity*, 15; Lury, *Consumer Culture*, 9.

<sup>10</sup> Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, 'The body in consumer culture' in Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska (ed.), *Women in Twentieth Century Britain: Social, Cultural and Political Change*, London: Longman, 2001, 184.

<sup>11</sup> *Vogue*, 19 March 1930, 98.

<sup>12</sup> Advertisement for Lux, *Vogue* 20 March 1935, 32.

<sup>13</sup> 'Sweet Shopping at Selfridges', *Vogue*, 18 September 1935, 79.



End as discussed in Part I, can be read as just such a list of commodities with which to construct the ideal woman/shopper.

The 1930s women's magazine packaged itself as more than a practical tool for identity construction: it was a talisman, a 'magic touchstone',<sup>14</sup> to ward off social embarrassment in a world of status insecurity. *Woman's* launch message was, 'Honestly, we are a godsend. Don't do without us a moment longer.'<sup>15</sup> In a similar vein, in 1930 a reader, no doubt fictional, petitioned the *Vogue* Shopping Service,

I am a doubtful Dresser. I'm not a bad dresser, and if I read my Vogues carefully I do realise where waists are and how long skirts, what colours will keep me well dressed for the longest time ... when I come up to London to buy I want to have every available bit of information catalogued in my mind so that I shall not get what is in bad taste nor quickly going out of date.<sup>16</sup>

This letter suggests a consumer cast adrift without the manual. [Figure 14.7] Similarly, the crowds of shoppers illustrated in 'Vogue's eye view of early Christmas shopping' clutched their copies of *Vogue* as they headed for the shops.<sup>17</sup> In these narratives, the magazine was shown as both an integral part of the shopping self, and also as something 'other', a necessary addition that needed to be purchased.

Over the decades, the editorial voice of women's magazines had developed a particular tone that attempted to attain a reader's trust. This voice suggested the intimacy of a conversation between friends, but exploited this position to strip away reader autonomy and offer her an alternative, better, identity. The magazine presented itself as the proficient shopper, the reader as the 'amateur'. The magazine thus replicated the role of the professional shoppers, particularly popular in the United States, who advertised their services in *Vogue* directories.<sup>18</sup> By professionalising shopping - by defining 'essential shopping knowledge' as a complex and constantly changing compendium of information - the magazine stacked the odds against the individual consumer being able to accomplish ideal femininity alone. *Vogue* boasted of its 'Shopping Information Service', 'Entire trousseaux and other complete outfits are now being purchased for readers. Detailed information is provided concerning dress budgets. *Vogue*, in fact, is really dressing many of its readers ... It plans for thousands of women, while you plan

<sup>14</sup> *Vogue* (New York), 12 April 1930, 16.

<sup>15</sup> 'Let us help you', *Woman*, 12 June 1937, 4.

<sup>16</sup> 'The Doubtful Dresser', *Vogue*, 22 January 1930, 60.

<sup>17</sup> 'Vogue's eye view of early Christmas shopping', *Vogue*, 13 November 1935, 53.

<sup>18</sup> For example, 'Shoppers' and Buyers' guide', *Vogue* (New York), 1 February 1930, 24-5.



for one alone; it deals with hundreds of shops, while you deal with a handful.'<sup>19</sup>

However, this study of *Vogue* reassesses the didactic power of the magazine, arguing for a reading of the magazine which allows text and consumer identity to be mutually constitutive. The magazine was committed to the reflection of 1930s consumer types that were popularly recognised, in order for the representations to have some purchase. Balancing the power of the editorial voice in this period of a flourishing women's periodical press was the corollary that this growth was related to magazines' and advertisers' increasing recognition of women as an important consumer group. [Figure 14.8] For instance, the *Woman's Magazine* articulated its appeal to potential advertisers with the inducement, 'Buying is a woman's occupation! Make the *Woman's Magazine* your shop window'.<sup>20</sup> [Figure 14.9] Female shoppers were also depicted as confident, powerful and to be courted, and were addressed in new publications such as *London Shopping News*.

[Figure 14.10] The power of the female consumer was frequently articulated at this time in terms of her modernity. *Vogue's* female consumer, like the 'Simpsons man', was drawn with distinctly modern features within the cover art of Georges Lepape, Eduardo Benito, Christian Bérard, Cecil Beaton and a host of other artists and photographers.<sup>21</sup> This slant was accentuated by her location within the magazine and the West End shop, which this thesis has established as important sites of modernity. [Figure 14.11] In an article entitled 'Design Moves On - Are you keeping up?', *Commercial Art and Industry* sent a clear message to British manufacturing, constructing a genealogy of women and domestic architecture which ascribed the feminine consumer discriminating, modern sensibilities. It warned, 'The buyer of tomorrow is *this* woman. Are your goods designed to satisfy her taste?'<sup>22</sup>

The gap between representations of ideal metropolitan femininity and real readers, which was implied by both the relentless attempts to reconstruct consumers, and the breadth of incomes actually addressed by a magazine like *Vogue*, was wide enough to allow for the intrusion of other consumer identities. *Vogue's* 'limited income' section can be read as an acknowledgement of this diversity, and also as an attempt to control these alternatives, retaining them in the fold of fashionable West End cultures. Reader 'agency' - the capacity to imagine and create identity, to negotiate actively between alternatives - was implicitly invited

<sup>19</sup> *Vogue*, 19 March 1930, 98.

<sup>20</sup> *Commercial Art*, November 1931, p.iv

<sup>21</sup> William Packer, *The Art of Vogue Covers 1909 - 1940*, London: Octopus, 1980.

<sup>22</sup> *Commercial Art and Industry*, May 1935, 196-7.



by the mix of contents within the magazine: readers were able to choose which parts to read, and in what order.<sup>23</sup> 'Agency' was more overtly encouraged in the 'limited income' section, where clothes were sewn and knitted, and even maiding was done for oneself. A consideration of this model of identity suggests a more complex functioning of *Vogue*'s expert knowledges, shopping cultures and geographies, linked closely to the realm of interior life as well as performed activity.

The fracturing of *Vogue* consumer identity suggested by this study correlates with the 'fractured voice' created by the magazine format, which has been a subject of interest to historians. Beetham, for example, has written, 'the periodical is ... marked by a radical heterogeneity. It refused, and still refuses, a single authorial voice ...'.<sup>24</sup> Work on magazines of the Victorian and Edwardian eras, a time when fears about the instability of class boundaries ran high, has highlighted aspirational understandings of their lifestyle and fashion content. Breward describes the complexity of readings,

Those magazines aimed at a wealthier readership pitched their contents at the level of reportage, responding to the very achievable desires of their intended audience ... Titles catering for the middle classes and below operated on two levels, offering both a dream of unattainable glamour that spoke to the deeper desires and imagination of the reader, with all the attendant problems of moral suitability and expense temporarily set aside, and an opportunity to realise some of that glamour through economy, home-production and adaptation, in a framework cognisant of societal expectations and restrictions.<sup>25</sup>

Despite an initial impression that magazine profiles were clearly definable in the 1930s, features, editorials, fashion news, advertisements and classifieds can be seen to offer a multitude of apparently contradictory feminine models for readers to choose between. However, by this time the multiplicity of readings seems to have aroused fewer worries about class instability than in the studies mentioned above, and was indeed an established and accepted way that the magazine functioned.

Part I suggested that lower-middle and working-class women were excluded from the West End through magazines' constructions of shopping geographies. *Vogue* did this by filtering out the less desirable streets, shops and shoppers from its exclusive map, whereas *Home Chat* and *Woman's* shopping map largely ignored the West End in favour of the local high street. This

<sup>23</sup> This point is made in Beetham, *A Magazine of her own?*, 12-13.

<sup>24</sup> Beetham, *A Magazine of her own?*, 12.

<sup>25</sup> Christopher Breward, 'Patterns of Respectability' in Barbara Burman (ed.), *The Culture of Sewing: Gender, Consumption and Home Dressmaking*, Oxford: Berg, 1999, 25 Beetham also discusses this point. Beetham, *A Magazine of her own?*



view is in line with Beddow's discussion of lower middle and working-class women's restriction to the domestic sphere during the inter-war years.<sup>26</sup> The issue of exclusion is an undercurrent running through consumption cultures, often overlooked by histories that have stressed instead stories about increased availability of consumer goods and the inclusion of an ever-greater proportion of the population in consumer society. Exclusion is a theme considered by Bowlby in her discussion of the heroine of Dreiser's novel *Sister Carrie*, who surveys shop displays with a sense of dejection and alienation rather than pleasure.<sup>27</sup> A comparable alienation was expressed in 'Last Fling', the story of a lower-middle-class bride-to-be from Beckenham, published in *Woman* in 1939. She related the stressful, disorienting experience of furnishing her future home with a few prized purchases from Oxford Street stores. For her, this was an ill-advised West End interlude before she returned to the safety of the suburbs where she belonged.<sup>28</sup>

*Woman* and *Home Chat* conveyed the exclusion of their target readers not only from the West End, but also from the pleasurable consumption of fashionable clothing and goods celebrated there. Fashionability was not in itself problematic: much of the content of both magazines was about fashion, including discussions of Paris trends and reviews of the clothes of fashionable London society women. It was rather that *shopping* for such items that caused difficulty. Alexander makes the point that 'Few, in the 1930s, could afford the clothes in the shops'<sup>29</sup> and it is certainly true that *Woman* and *Home Chat* did not accompany these fashion features with the names and addresses of the exclusive stores where the models could be purchased. These articles seemed to function as a fantasy about fashionability and lifestyle, and there was an implicit accompanying message that to cross this boundary between fantasy and reality was to court disaster.

For instance, a story in *Woman*, 'The New Dress', conveyed the ambiguous moral status of fashionable consumption within some lower-middle and working-class circles. It was the tale of a penniless suburban housewife, desperate to repair her ailing marriage by improving her shabby clothes. 'She wheeled the pram right down the High Street looking into the dress shops, rocking the pram up and down as she picked out the bargains. There was a dress in one window that was just exactly like the one she'd dreamt of ... smart, expensive-looking, single-

<sup>26</sup> Beddow, Deirdre, *Back to Home and Duty: Women Between the Wars*, London: Pandora, 1989.

<sup>27</sup> Bowlby, *Just Looking*, 58.

<sup>28</sup> *Woman*, 2 September 1939.

<sup>29</sup> Alexander, 'Becoming a Woman', 221.



looking.’<sup>30</sup> The woman finally realised that buying the dress would be frivolous and selfish when her husband desperately needed a new suit for work, and thus the marriage was saved. Even window-shopping was cast as a dangerous temptation: to buy the dress would have been to threaten established family values. Here, echoes are to be found of the nineteenth-century anxieties about the destabilising effects of feminine consumption, and of the worries about the ‘Simpsons man’ in the 1930s, outlined in the previous chapter.

In these magazines, clothes provisioning was presented almost exclusively in terms of home dressmaking and knitting, with the occasional use of mail-order. *Home Chat*, with its more domestic edge, devoted as much attention to renovating and repairing existing clothing stock as to new garments.<sup>31</sup> However, the absence of clothes shopping was equally discernible in *Woman*. This emphasis is significant given that early agenda-setting articles such as ‘Women must work’<sup>32</sup> make it clear that *Woman*’s target audience included working women, the group credited with expanding the market for ready-to-wear clothing in the inter-war period.<sup>33</sup> But her alignment with housewives in terms of home dressmaking made plain in articles such as: ‘From morn to night: a business girl and a young housewife choose exactly the kind of Woman “Simplicity” patterns they like to wear.’<sup>34</sup> The geographies and practices associated with consumer identity would indeed seem clearly defined by class, rather than occupational status.<sup>35</sup>

Light’s discussion of the more solidly middle-class ‘Mrs Miniver’ serialised in *The Times*, suggested different kind of ambiguity over the act of consumption. She argued that the protagonist displayed a distaste for the supposed materialist nature of the expanding lower-middle-class group during her West End trips, and thus differentiated her consumption practices from theirs,

When she goes shopping it is for luxuries, not necessities (a Christmas or birthday present), and she brings back not purchases, but experiences. She may visit department stores, but even her spending isn’t

<sup>30</sup> *Woman*, 5 June 1937, 22-5.

<sup>31</sup> This buying of fabric remnants held a curious position. Sometimes the act of consumption was portrayed a task, an essential part of managing the household budget. At other times, remnant buying was shown to hold the same pleasurable meanings as shopping for a new dress, even if this is something to be warned against, ‘Its no good reasoning with a woman once the sales fever has got her... A few yards of brilliant striped silk are irresistible, and bought before she has spared a moment to think of their possible use.’ ‘We’ve been to the sales!’ *Woman*, 8 July 1939, 28-9.

<sup>32</sup> The agenda of *Woman*, and her target audience, is discussed in an early issue, *Woman*, 12 June 1937, 10-11.

<sup>33</sup> Amy de la Haye, ‘The Role of Design within the Commercialisation of Women’s Ready-to-Wear Clothing in Britain During the Inter-War Years, With Specific Reference to the Cheapest Levels of Production’, MA thesis, V&A Museum and Royal College of Art, 1986; Horwood, ‘*Keeping Up Appearances*’.

<sup>34</sup> *Woman*, 1 1939, 9.

<sup>35</sup> Historians have frequently categorised women’s magazines by class. See for example, Beddoe, Deirdre, *Back to Home and Duty: Women Between the Wars*, London: Pandora, 1989.



sordid: shopping is pure pleasure for her, an extension of ego and autonomy which bears no resemblance to the daily round ... We never hear her ordering the mutton.<sup>36</sup>

Humble on the other hand maintains that in this period, the upper middle classes developed 'thrift' as a virtue: 'if the lower middle classes had money to burn, then how much classier it must be to refrain from spending, to patch your old clothes rather than buying new ones.'<sup>37</sup> Whilst there might have existed a number within this class who shunned fashionable consumption, the case for this being a strong or even dominant, cultural force is less convincing. It is certainly not reflected during the 1930s in *Vogue*, where the upper middle class was presented as a group which avidly consumed fashion, not ostensibly threatened by the increased purchasing power of other middle-class and working-class groups. An anti-consumerist theme *was* more visible in wartime, but was generally more associated with masculine consumption in the period: [Figure 12.2] the presentation of the badly-dressed gentleman as a figure of fun in Simpsons' advertisements was a clear response to the rhetoric about fashionable consumption being a feminine domain.

## ARMCHAIR SHOPPING

*Vogue's* 'limited income' section suggested that within the breadth of middle-class consumer identities, the West End could be positioned within quite complex geographies. In addition to the shopping networks sketched out in Part I, there were also links between the shop and the home, a place where clothes were made and magazines were read. It is within this home environment that distinctions between real and virtual geographies of shopping and fashionable consumption blurred, through a mixture of 'aspirational' and 'fantastic' readings of the magazine and its West End cultures. [Figure 14.12] This invites an acknowledgment of the importance of magazines, and particularly the processes of reading magazines, within feminine consumer cultures, symbolised in the Lepape's cover art of 1930, in which *Vogue* was held aloft by a fashionable reader.

[Figures 14.13 and 14.14] Part IV argues that certain kinds of fashionable consumer identities were located firmly in the West End, but magazines and newspapers also constituted sites of consumption, undercutting the dominant message about shopping geography. This concept

<sup>36</sup> Light, *Forever England*, 141

<sup>37</sup> Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel*, 88.



was repeatedly promoted by publishers in their quest for advertisers, for example the *Daily Telegraph* appealed to advertisers: 'Women go shopping through the *Daily Telegraph*'.<sup>38</sup> The images and text of the newspapers and magazines went further, implicitly suggesting that the process of reading itself constituted on some level a shopping practice. *Vogue*'s 'Shopping and Information Service', which allowed the registered reader to shop entirely through *Vogue*, completely abdicating responsibility for constructing her own shopping itinerary, or for even leaving the house.<sup>39</sup> There are clearly connections to be made with mail order shopping, where the home became a central node in a consumption network. But the content of magazines also suggested a virtual shopping trip, which took place in an imagined West End.

It has already been suggested by historians that women's magazines were a space for women's aspirations, fantasies and desires to be expressed and nourished, a function that was closely linked to the spectacle of modern consumer cultures discussed in Part III. Scanlon's concept of 'journal-generated daydreams'<sup>40</sup> is particularly useful for identifying a mode of reading the magazine that fed lifestyle aspirations and constructions of the self. The society reportage and romantic fiction in lower-middle and working-class magazines, featuring a way of life that was blatantly out of the reach of most readers, functioned very clearly in this manner. Although readers of *Vogue* were not so explicitly invited to engage in such readings, occasional allusions are made to parallel readings of its text. For instance, a review of Maud Cairnes' novel *Strange Journey* published in *Vogue* suggested the pleasures of fantasy, through the literal adoption of a new identity, and through reading about it:

To change places with another person, suddenly and completely, to get inside her skin, eat at her table, sleep in her bed, meet her friends - this might be fun and would at any rate be an escape from one's own skin, table, bed and friends. So thought Polly Wilkinson, suburban housewife, at her garden gate, watching a beautiful Rolls-Royce glide by, and so also thought Lady Elizabeth Forrester, who was inside the Rolls Royce ...<sup>41</sup>

Whereas the relationship between desire and consumer goods was seen to be problematic in the Victorian and Edwardian periods due to its destabilising effect on class boundaries and female morality, this fracturing appears to have been a more openly acknowledged and accepted function of the magazine in the 1930s. This is suggested by *Woman*'s inaugural editorial of 1937, in which it described itself as 'a magazine of fact and fiction'; 'We are, in

<sup>38</sup> *Commercial Art and Industry*, October 1934, 167.

<sup>39</sup> This service was promoted in *Vogue*, 19 March 1930, 98.

<sup>40</sup> Scanlon, *Inarticulate Longings*, 232.

<sup>41</sup> *Vogue*, 20 March 1935 111.



short, a magazine in two parts. In the first part we seek to entertain you with vivid, vital stories and articles touching every side of life and human interest. In the second we give you practical help and inspiration concerning your home.'<sup>42</sup>

Thus the moralising, anti-consumerist message of 'The New Dress' story was undercut by the claims of *Woman* and indeed magazines catering to all classes of women, to simultaneously and quite unproblematically both provide information and nourish fantasy. A single article might also do so simultaneously, the text eliciting different responses from its various readerships, which, as has been established, were likely to be more diverse than the dominant magazine profile. Features on the real lives of titled and rich society women such as *Vogue's* regular society gossip column, 'How One Lives From Day to Day,' might entertain with the details of one's own world, or somebody else's. This thesis suggests fantasy was equally at play in readings of *Vogue's* ostensibly practical Shop-hound column, so that the shopping geographies could function as a virtual map of an imagined city, providing the material for a West End shopping experience from the comfort of an arm-chair.

#### 'SHE MAKES HER OWN'

[Figure 14.15] There were, however, other ways of experiencing West End Consumption on a 'limited income' that disrupted any dichotomy between actual shopping in the real city and virtual shopping in an imagined city. Home dressmaking was one important way of experiencing this imagined place, allowing traces of the West End to be sewn into *real* garments without an actual visit to the shops.

*Vogue's* article 'Shopping – Then and Now', encountered in the introduction to this thesis, had commented on the prominent rise of ready-to-wear in the inter-war years,<sup>43</sup> a trend which has caught the attention of historians. However, the practice of home dressmaking and the use of local networks of dressmakers amongst the middle classes have been underestimated in the same period. Existing histories have uncovered the practice of home dressmaking throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, showing how it was consistently used by those in socially 'precarious' positions to maintain respectability and access fashionability.<sup>44</sup> The evidence of

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<sup>42</sup> *Woman*, 5 June 1937.

<sup>43</sup> 'Shopping – Then and Now', 73.

<sup>44</sup> C.Breward, B.Burman in Barbara Burman (ed.), *The Culture of Sewing: Gender, Consumption and Home Dressmaking*,



women's magazines and oral histories suggests that levels of skill right across the middle-class group remained high in the 1930s.<sup>45</sup> Unlike the *Vogue* shopper, stranded without her shopping manual, the 'limited income' consumer was ascribed agency, because 'She makes her own.'<sup>46</sup>

[Figure 14.16] The practice of home dressmaking can be read both as providing identities that resisted *Vogue*'s dominant message about shopping, and alternative methods of accessing it: it did not necessarily entail a jettisoning of the consumption cultures of the West End. Burman makes the case that the magazine was an important factor in the commodification of home dressmaking during the Edwardian period:

Publishers, manufacturers and retailers involved in the home dressmaking market for magazines, sewing machines and paper patterns pressed the case for their goods, in large part, on the grounds that they now offered quick and affordable access to fashionable appearance. The Edwardian years are marked by this commercial manoeuvre; home dressmaking was pulled further into the marketplace, to be sold back to consumers as an emblem of modernity and style.<sup>47</sup>

In the 1930s, home dressmaking remained closely associated with the mechanisms of modern consumer culture. It was certainly an important component of *Vogue*, continuing the traditional association between women's magazines and paper pattern companies. The 'limited income' section of *Vogue* was a vehicle for the promotion of *Vogue* patterns, like *Vogue Pattern Book*, which was sold in conjunction with the magazine. Home dressmaking also shared cultures with the magazine and the department store: both concerned with the consumption of fashionable clothing, and with the construction of feminine identities, operating in the realm of fantasy and desire. [Figure 14.17] The front cover of *Vogue Pattern Book* of February-March 1934 illustrated the *Vogue* dressmaker as a paper dressing-doll, to whom identities could be easily affixed – equivalent to a shopper trying on alternative identities within a store changing room.<sup>48</sup>

Oral histories show that women built up stocks of paper patterns, sewing machines and other equipment, fabric and haberdashery within the home. These components were reused and shared through informal social networks. However the same evidence reveals that these items were also treated as *commodities* by home dressmakers, magazines and the stores that sold

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Oxford: Berg, 1999; Edwards, 'Home dressmaking 1939-1945'.

<sup>45</sup> Edwards, 'Home dressmaking 1939-1945'.

<sup>46</sup> 'She makes her own', *Vogue*, 19 August 1936.

<sup>47</sup> Burman 'Made at Home by Clever Fingers', 44.

<sup>48</sup> Front Cover, *Vogue Pattern Book*, February-March 1934.



them.<sup>49</sup> It was largely the conception of these things as desirable purchases that meant a close relationship could be maintained by *Vogue* between its 'limited income' identity and the promotion of West End consumer culture.

Far from being positioned as an unfashionable, domestic and traditional practice, home dressmaking was compatible with modern, fashionable femininity. It lacked the stigma that became associated with it in the post-war period.<sup>50</sup> *Vogue* consistently presented home dressmaking as an alternative, vicarious means of participating in shopping cultures, which were specifically *West End* cultures. Many pattern companies, like the magazines associated with them, had established West End bases. During the 1930s, *Vogue* regularly published a directory of retail outlets for *Vogue* Patterns. This directory could be mapped directly onto the magazine's West End-centred map of fashionable consumption and living outlined in Part I. In its directory of October 1935, first listed were the West End stores; the Army and Navy, Derry and Toms, Dickens and Jones, D.H.Evans, Galeries Lafayette, Gorrings, Harrods, Harvey Nichols, Peter Jones, John Lewis, Liberty and Co, Marshall and Snelgrove, The Needlewoman, Parnells, Peter Robinson, Selfridges, William Whiteley's, and Woolland Bros. This was followed by a list of department stores in London's suburbs, then provincial towns. Next were addresses for stores in Ceylon, China, Egypt, India, Italy, Malta, Palestine, Rhodesia and South Africa.<sup>51</sup> The resonance of this West End-centred map for an expatriate market is suggested by an oral history recording of a young woman living in Naples' English community during the 1930s. She describes subscribing to British pattern magazines, and ordering lawns and silks from Liberty's.<sup>52</sup>

The message was that women who wore clothes made with *Vogue* patterns embodied *Vogue*'s feminine identities. Production techniques meant that patterns could quickly follow the latest fashions, *Vogue* reassuring readers that 'new patterns are cut every fortnight.'<sup>53</sup> [Figures 14.18 and 14.19] Outfits spanned *Vogue*'s geography of fashionable life: there were beach clothes 'for the lucky ones who escape from cold winter winds'<sup>54</sup> and there were outfits for wearing on a West End shopping trip: 'When you go shopping, like the two women above (you can tell they're *Vogue* fans as they're both wearing *Vogue* Pattern outfits), see that you put the next

<sup>49</sup> See for example the oral history recordings: 'Home dressmaking Reassessed', AV550, Hampshire Record Office; Edwards, 'Home dressmaking 1939-1945'.

<sup>50</sup> Edwards, 'Home dressmaking 1939-1945'.

<sup>51</sup> *Vogue*, 2 October 1935.

<sup>52</sup> 'Home dressmaking Reassessed', AV550/7, Hampshire Record Office.

<sup>53</sup> *Vogue*, 5 March 1930, 37.

<sup>54</sup> 'For the lucky ones who escape from cold winter winds', *Vogue Pattern Book*, February-March 1934.



Vogue first on your list.’<sup>55</sup>

This study of home dressmaking in *Vogue* contributes to our understandings of the concept of ‘imagined cities’, constructed through text and fantasy, but providing a meaningful sense of place. It has been suggested that this fantastic register allowed West End references to be sewn into *real* garments without an actual visit to the shops. Such a reading invites a reassessment of even *Home Chat* and *Woman* consumers’ exclusion from the West End. Much of the fashion advice in these titles was about aspirational dressing. *Woman* urged its readers, ‘When the new fashions come out, don’t just dismiss them with “too exaggerated” or “too expensive for me”. Look at them carefully, notice the effects they are aiming at and how to get them, then try to reproduce the same effects with your own clothes.’<sup>56</sup> The way these aspirations were articulated within the magazines reveal hidden connections with metropolitan consumer cultures, cultures that seeped into design ideas, fabric and patterns, and garments. It was not inconsequential that *Home Chat* readers were encouraged to send off to an Oxford Street address for featured paper dress patterns, and that the magazine also advertised West End dressmakers.<sup>57</sup>

A reconsideration should also be made of the straightforward consignment of lower-middle and working-class women’s magazines’ society news and fashions to the realm of aspirational dreaming. Oral histories and the sewing advice columns within these magazines confirm that many readers had the skills to copy the dresses worn by the elite in the magazine’s photographs and in the West End shop window, and could create close copies for their own suburban and provincial wardrobes without even resorting to a paper pattern.<sup>58</sup> These skills could make the metropolitan dream, or at least a close approximation of it, a meaningful reality.

This chapter has discussed feminine consumer identities which could be constructed through imagined as well as real shopping practices, and in so doing has suggested that the process of conceptualising the West End as a site of consumption could serve a function whether or not it was actually visited, adding additional, virtual dimensions to the shopping geographies discussed in Part I. By moving beyond the rhetoric of department store publicity, and looking

<sup>55</sup> *Vogue*, 16 September 1936, inside back cover.

<sup>56</sup> *Woman*, II 1939, 23.

<sup>57</sup> See for example the advertisement for dress made up by ‘Mayfair Models’ in Hanover Square, close to Oxford Circus. *Home Chat*, 22 February 1930, 406.

<sup>58</sup> This is noted by Alexander is an important component of inter-war consumer culture, as experienced by working-class women. Alexander, ‘Becoming a Woman’, 221.



behind the dominant messages of *Vogue*, this chapter also reveals possibilities for consumer identities which related to more empowered notions of inter-war femininity than those suggested by authors such as Reekie.<sup>59</sup> This discussion of alternative feminine consumer identities furthermore highlights the multiplicity of meanings of clothing provision within the women's magazine, which could be mapped onto the variety of garment provenance within a woman's wardrobe. In the inter-war period, shopping and making were bound up with each other, so that feminine consumer identities were literally constructed by women with their sewing machines, magazines and imaginations.

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The desire of those engaged in constructing consumer types to appeal to a broad sector of the population, and the opportunities for subverting dominant models, made consumer identity rather slippery. However, Part IV argues that the types discussed were closely associated with the specific consumer cultures of the 1930s West End in several ways. The 'Simpsons man' and *Vogue* reader of 'limited income' were distinctly and self-consciously modern, expressed through their garments, their gender definitions and the design of their environments. They were clearly at home in the '*New London*' of *Vogue*'s article, and within the Modern architecture of Simpsons and Peter Jones.

They furthermore both embodied the fluidity of production and consumption which was a feature of fashionable West End shopping cultures of the 1930s, identified within the dressmakers at home, the professional dressmakers of the upper stories of Regent Street, Savile Row tailors and the Soho rag trade. [Figure 4.20] This blurring was epitomised by the continued importance of drapery departments within the West End's new, Modern department stores, such as D. H. Evans: any attempt to separate production and consumption would clearly be misleading.

Most importantly, Part IV has pointed to the interrelationship between identity and place, contributing to this thesis's broader examination of the 'locatedness' of consumer cultures. Whilst these types operated in broader geographical environments, when they did so they brought something of the West End with them, acting as signifiers of that place.

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<sup>59</sup> Reekie, *Temptations*.



## CONCLUSION

This thesis has sought to bring together studies of shopping routes and networks, retail architecture, spectacle, consumer types and consumption practices to construct a new kind of shopping history. It has argued for the significance of the 1930s West End, which has hitherto been overlooked in favour of the Victorian and Edwardian periods, and also the more rationalised inter-war retail system exemplified by multiples and local shopping nodes. The vibrancy of 1930s metropolitan consumption has been uncovered through the evidence of magazines like *Vogue*, tourist and shopping guides, and the retail strategies of stores, especially their promotional policies and building programmes. However, the thesis has also constructed a more nuanced picture of the West End's shopping cultures, drawing attention to key characteristics within the themed sections.

A key part of the project has been to challenge existing narratives of modernity by arguing for the importance of a particular moment when Modernism, shopping cultures and new consumer identities collided in the streets of the West End, announcing a new era of shopping and modern urban life. It has been shown that Modern architecture, graphics and display constituted highly significant arrivals in the West End's retail sector, articulating modernity in a powerful way. But they also responded closely to the intricacies of shopping cultures, renegotiating the complex relationship between consumption, femininity, spectacle and design. The thesis has thus questioned assumptions about the irreconcilable nature of Modernism and consumption, and suggested that it was indeed



through its engagement with shopping cultures that the new architecture expressed the ‘modern spirit’ of the West End.

Another central argument has concerned the importance of place within shopping cultures, and conversely, the crucial role of shopping geographies in constructing and reflecting the character of the 1930s West End. Paying attention to the national and international as well as the local, the thesis has examined how the rise of new consumer cultures and identities during the period reconfigured these geographies. The subject of place has been approached on several levels: the thesis has argued for the primacy of the shopping street as a locus of consumption cultures, in contrast to the focus of existing narratives on the store interior and the home. Streets not only tied stores into routes, but were also the places where consumption was ‘staged’ through architecture, display and pageantry. But notions of the West End have also been allowed to move beyond the confines of the material place into the text of urban narratives and the imaginings of consumers, leading to a re-evaluation of the ways in which the West End infused 1930s consumer cultures.

The thesis has remained mindful that West End shopping celebrated the novel, the irrational and the fashionable, and that these vibrant metropolitan consumption cultures were ephemeral, evading the control of solid architectural structures, urban planners and even the institutions of the fashion industry. The fragility of these cultures and the ‘fleeting’ nature of the moment described in this thesis were drawn into sharp relief at the end of the 1930s with the changed conditions of wartime. In 1939 the fashion industry rallied for a gala night, the programme defiantly asserting: ‘You can’t ration fashion ... War isn’t a challenge to fashion. War is a challenge to women to remain fashionable’.<sup>1</sup> There is certainly an argument for the continued importance of maintaining fashionability during wartime, linked to boosting morale, defying the enemy and expressing patriotism. However, the relationship between fashion, consumption, morality and identity was significantly reconfigured, with particular consequences for West End shopping, associated as it was with luxury, pleasure and non-essential provisioning. Shopping for many goods *was* rationed and the nature of those goods was regulated. The directive to ‘make do and mend’ made its presence felt across all strata of society. It was embraced in their different ways by *Woman* and *Vogue*, and was even adopted as a mantra by West End stores, torn

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<sup>1</sup> Box 5, File A, Topic Collection: Clothes and Personal Appearance, Mass Observation Archive.



between making profits and adopting a patriotic image, their trading activities in any case increasingly regulated by government.<sup>2</sup>

The physical fabric of the West End was shown to be equally vulnerable: bombing devastating several of its important retail buildings.<sup>3</sup> It was less the actual scale of the loss than the pervasiveness of accounts of destruction that unsettled concepts of the West End and the solidity of its structures. [Figures 15.1 and 15.2] Images of crushed goods and shops reduced to smoking rubble soon made their way into store mythology. The bombing also provided the long-awaited opportunity to reconstruct the metropolis. Until the end of austerity conditions, building work was largely suspended and so architects and planners occupied themselves with preparations. In the decades that followed, the new, utopian, Modernist urban planning and the profiteering zeal of commercial developers would prove as great a potential threat to London's retail buildings and established shopping cultures as German planes.

Consumer identity proved particularly ephemeral. During the course of the war the very nature of the West End's populations changed dramatically due to conscription, recruitment to home-front industries and evacuation. Returning for a final time to the Simpsons case study: at this store, which had been so painstakingly designed around the 'Simpsons man' and his wardrobe, the relationship between shop, stock and consumer identity was to prove remarkably fluid and the subject of heated debate. Like other stores, as war progressed, much of Simpsons' trade was diverted to uniforms, and the elegant clubroom, the former haunt of the man-about-town, became a services club. In many ways this was a smart strategic move for the company, yet the shift away from traditionally successful lines such as Daks worried the management.<sup>4</sup> The store also became increasingly known for women's garments, the Board suggesting in 1939 that the women's department 'could quite possibly be the salvation of the store'.<sup>5</sup>

It is, however, important to note that the Simpsons consumer had proved an unstable category even *during* the thirties, concealed by the graphic consistency of the 'Simpsons

<sup>2</sup> Edwards, 'Home-Dressmaking 1939-1945'; Helen Reynolds, '“Your Clothes are Materials of War”: The British Government Promotion of Home Sewing during the Second World War', in Barbara Burman (ed.), *The Culture of Sewing: Gender, Consumption and Home Dressmaking*, Oxford: Berg, 1999; Christopher Sladen, *The Conscription of Fashion: Utility Cloth, Clothing and Footwear, 1941-1952*, Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1995.

<sup>3</sup> Casualties included John Lewis, Bourne and Hollingsworth and Peter Robinson.

<sup>4</sup> 'We must never let the public forget our association with such merchandise.' Minutes of the Board of Directors, 12 September 1939, Simpsons Archive.

<sup>5</sup> Board of Directors minutes, 26 October 1939, Simpsons Archive.



man' publicity. The early years of trading witnessed several changes in response to shifting consumption cultures, including the introduction of a young man's department and ski department in 1938. Even more significantly, the gender profile of the store had always been precarious. The one overt concession to femininity in the initial plan had been the gift shop: 'the department stocking suitable articles for gifts to husbands, sweethearts, sons and fathers, where women can buy with comfort and confidence.'<sup>6</sup> But it is apparent from press reports that women shopped at Simpsons in significant numbers. A women's department was introduced to the 'man's world' of Simpsons in the summer of 1937, barely a year after opening, followed swiftly by women's hairdressing, millinery and shoes, eventually occupying a full two floors during the war. The arrangement of the constituent departments of large stores was always unstable, but the allocation of floor space to Simpsons' women's department was particularly hotly contested. It was seen as a threat to the store's image, directors expressing concerns that 'the women's floor must have a distinct character, but it must not deviate from the general character of the store and must be in keeping with the store and arise out of the store'.<sup>7</sup> Despite good business, the company was half-hearted in promoting the women's department and was keen to 'confine' it to one floor as soon as the war was over.<sup>8</sup> This struggle over consumer identity points to retailers' broader difficulties in responding to and controlling the quickly changing consumer cultures of the West End.

When the West End's shops dusted themselves off in 1945, they were greeted by a changed world. Although there was to be no comprehensive redevelopment of the area's buildings and road systems, many West End retail businesses, notably the department stores, lacked something of their pre-war vibrancy, and competition with other forms of shopping was more keenly felt. Notions of fashionable consumption and the consumer were shifting, and with them the West End's shopping geography. In a few years, the shopping thoroughfares of Regent Street, Oxford Street and Piccadilly as well as the exclusive side streets such as Bond Street and Jermyn Street, whilst still very much in business, would be supplanted by Carnaby Street and the Kings Road as the loci of the most fashionable shopping cultures. The younger, more informal types who inhabited them would outshine the clean-shaven Daks-wearer and the *Vogue* reader sporting her home-made floral print dress. The failure of masterplanners to appreciate the essential double-

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<sup>6</sup> Notes by Joseph Emberton c. July 1935, Simpsons Archive.

<sup>7</sup> Board of Directors minutes, 24 November 1938, Simpsons Archive.

<sup>8</sup> In an unusual move, the Board decided it would not hold an opening event for the department. Board of Directors minutes, 17 February 1937, Simpsons Archive.



## CONCLUSION

sided fragility and dynamism of West End shopping would lead to significant miscalculations about replanning central London's shopping districts in the post-war years.



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# ILLUSTRATIONS



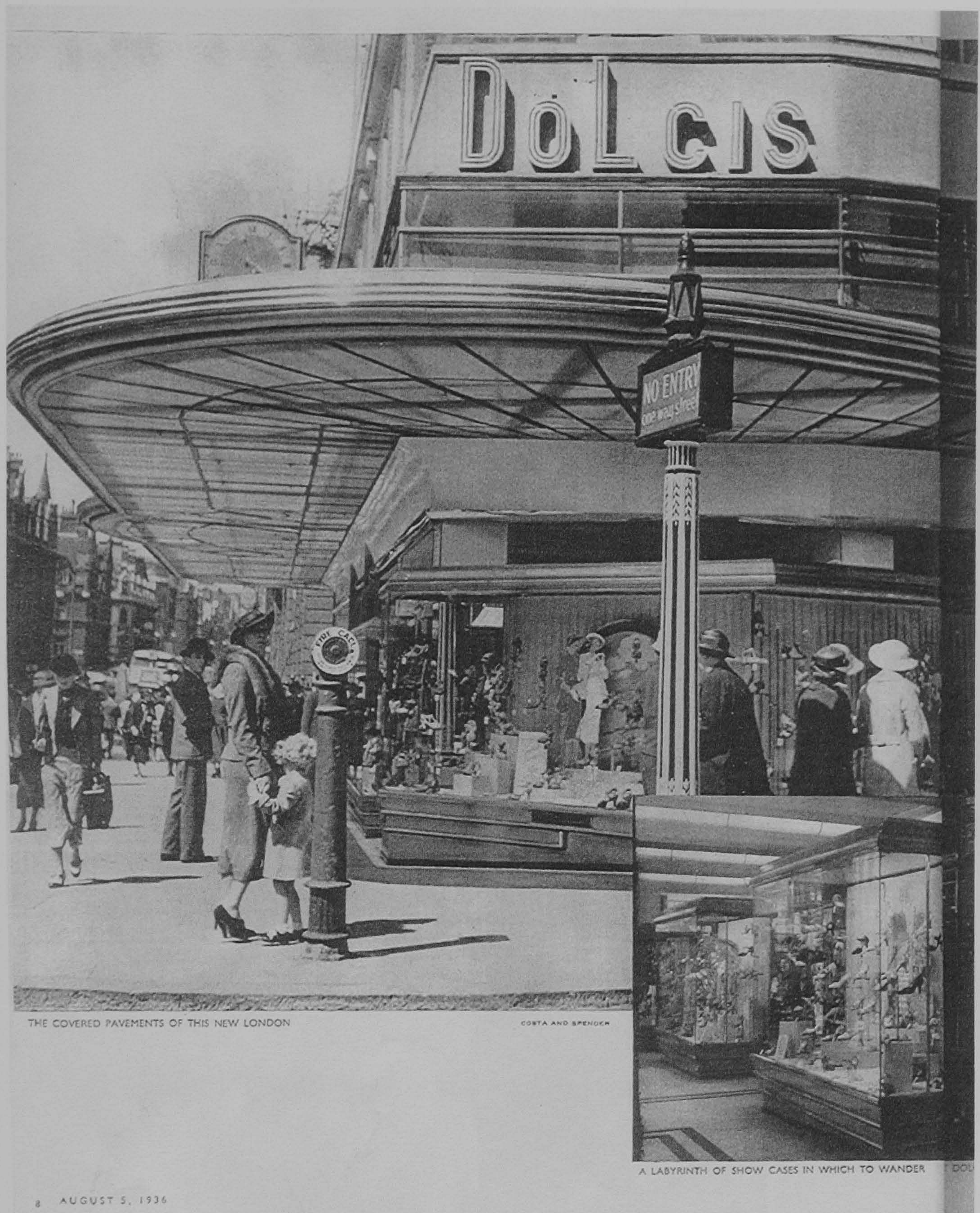


Figure 1.1 'The Covered Pavements of This New London' from 'A New London',  
*Vogue*, August 1936, 8.





Figure 2.1 'London Town is Moving Round', *Vogue*, 8 June 1938, 72.



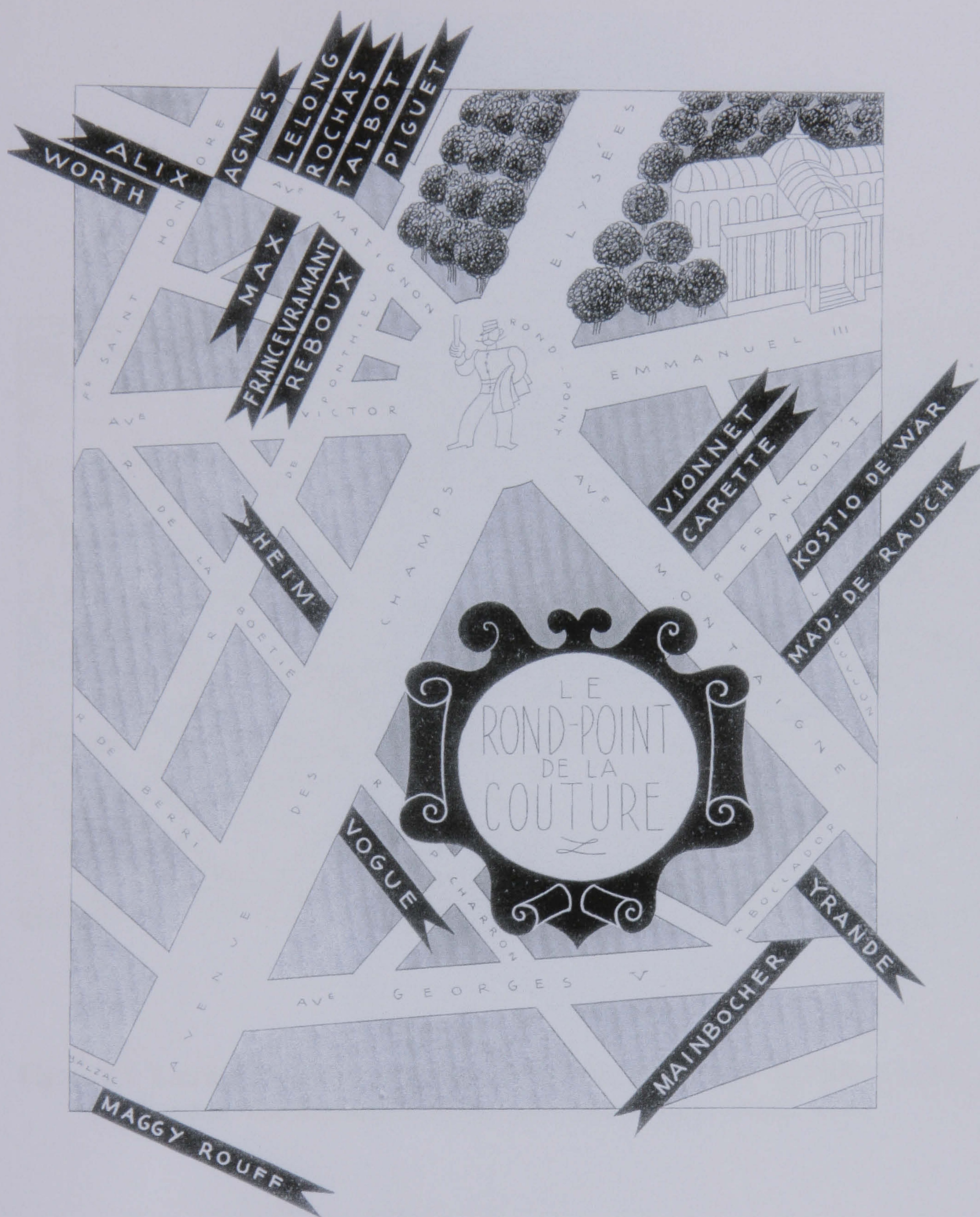


Figure 2.2 'Le Rond-Point de la Couture', *Vogue* (Paris), December 1935, 29.



London 1933 • The Principal Streets

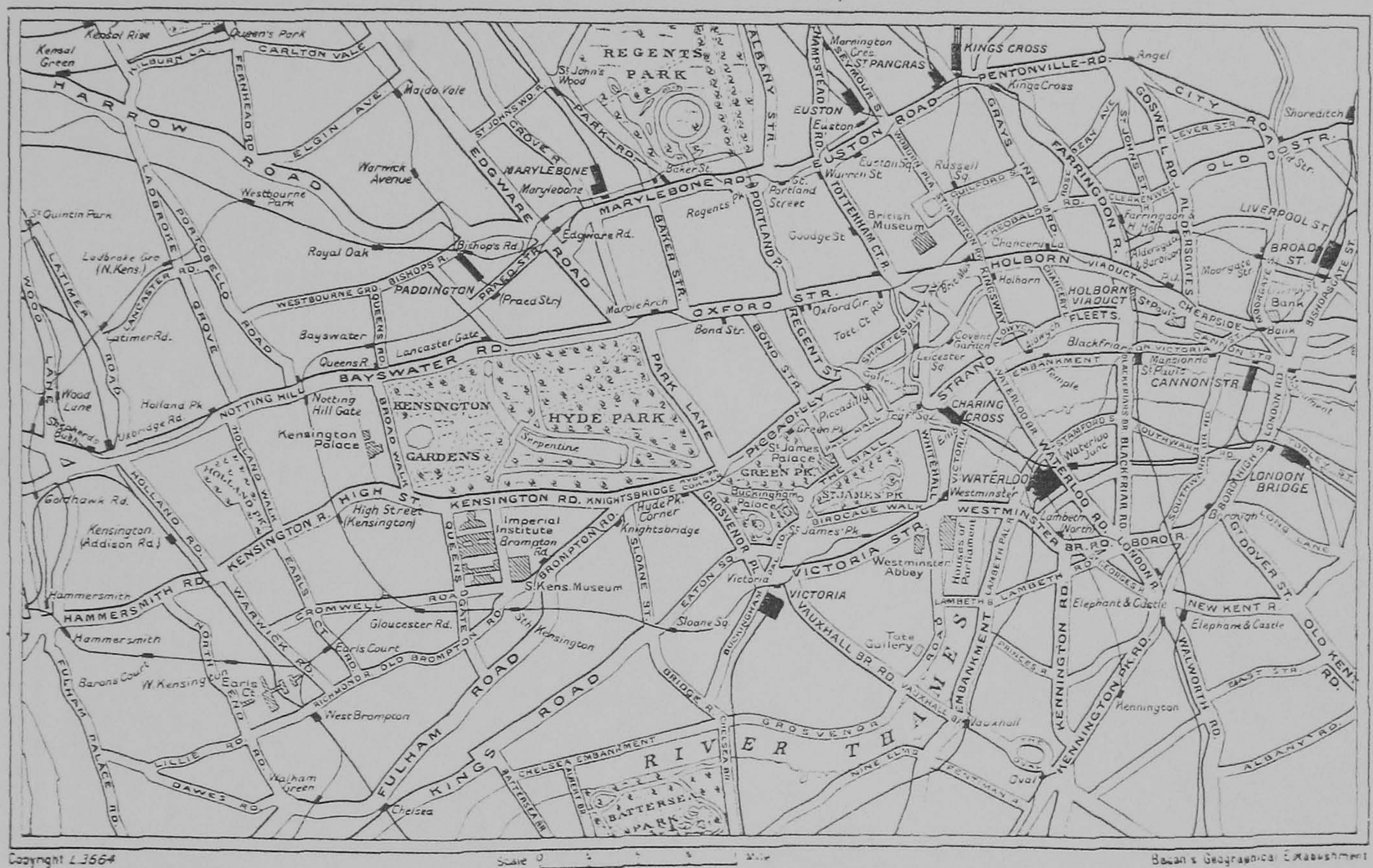


Figure 2.3 'London 1933: Principal Streets', *London What to See and Where to Stay*, London: The Residential Hotels and Caterers Association, 1933.





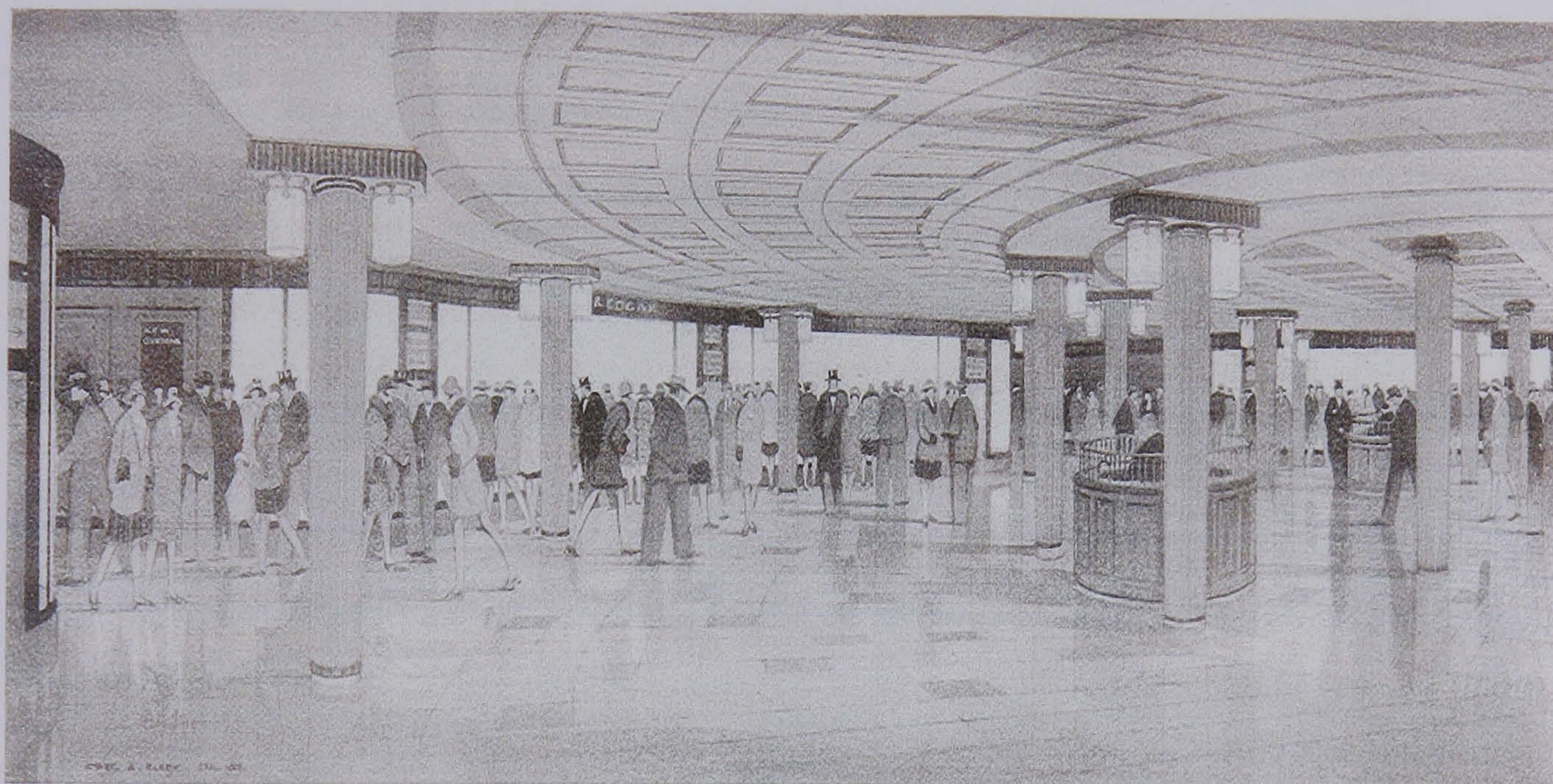
Figure 3.1 William Kent, *London for Everyman*, London: J. M. Dent, 1931, 24-5.





Figure 3.2 Diagrammatic map of the London Underground, Henry Beck, 1933, London Transport Museum





Piccadilly Circus Station : Booking Hall.  
MESSRS. ADAMS, HOLDEN AND PEARSON, F.R.I.B.A., Architects.

Figure 3.3 *The Builder*, 27 September 1929, 518.





The West-End is awakening—  
And once again there is  
everything for your pleasure

By **UNDERGROUND**

Figure 3.4 Underground poster by E.M.Dinkel, 1931, reproduced in  
*Commercial Art* February 1932, 55.



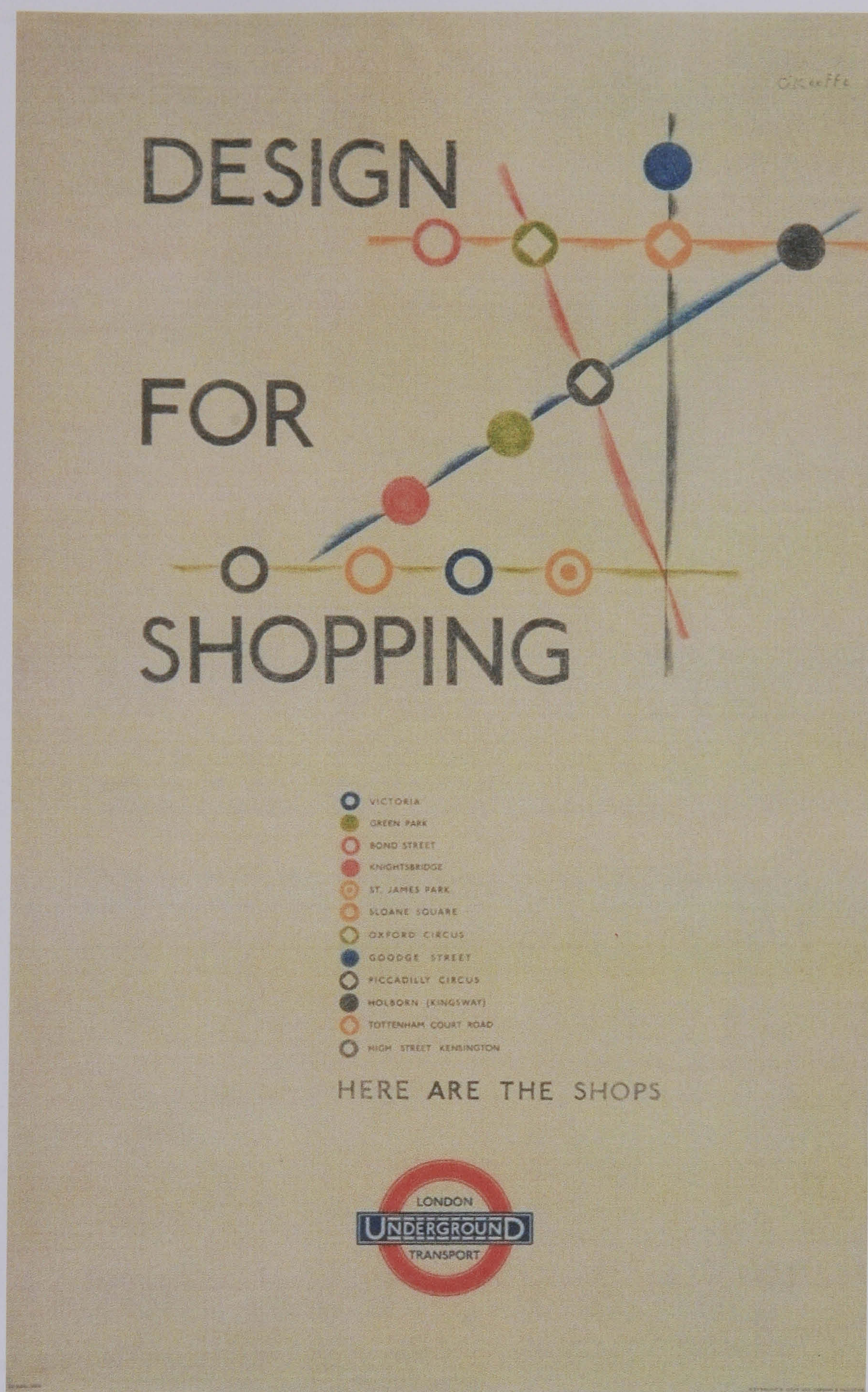
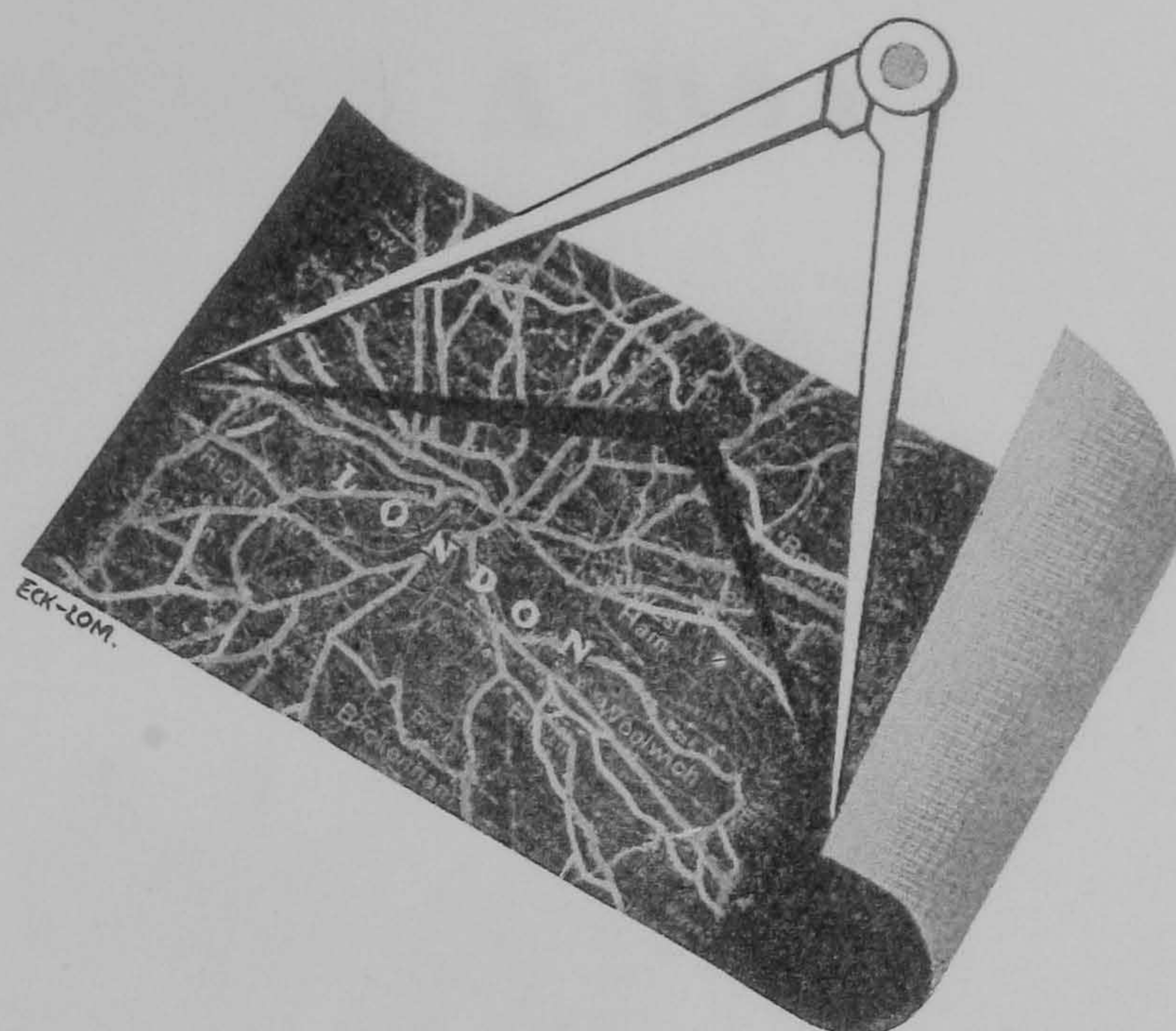


Figure 3.5 Poster by O'Keefe for London Transport, 1935, London Transport Museum





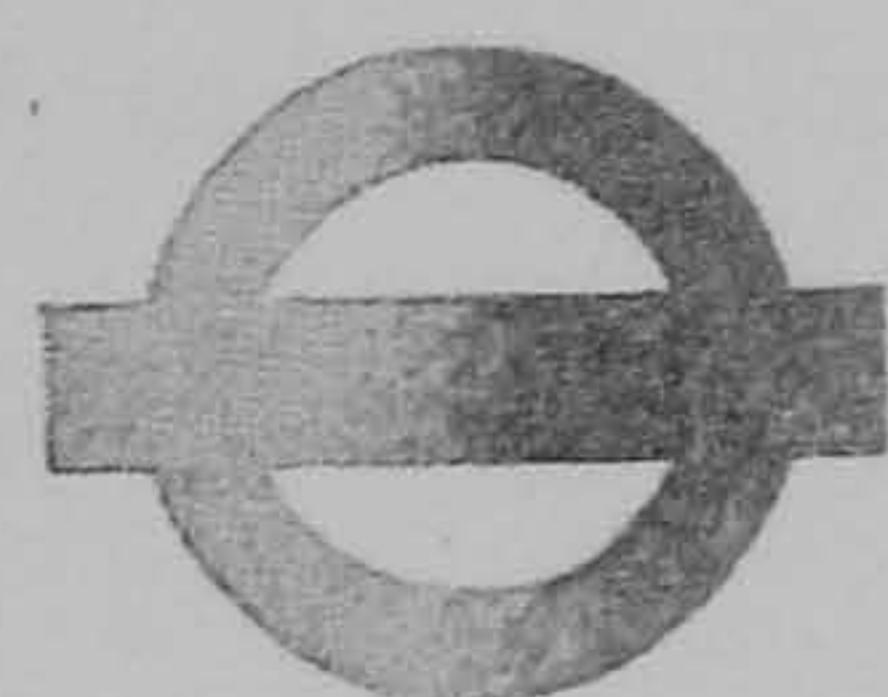
## A SHOP WINDOW AS WIDE AS LONDON

It may be yours by a not immoderate expenditure on poster space in the trains of London's Underground. For this system, stretching from end to end of London, extends **38** miles, and takes **1,500,000** people a day to and from **247** stations.

These passengers, generous spenders in the world's richest market, respond to good poster advertising.

A poster on the Underground will work **19** hours a day for a penny. Posting it, keeping it spick-and-span, lighting it—these services are not charged for.

Your next step might well be to write or telephone to the Commercial Advertising Officer, London Transport, 55 Broadway, S.W.1. Telephone: VICtoria 6800.



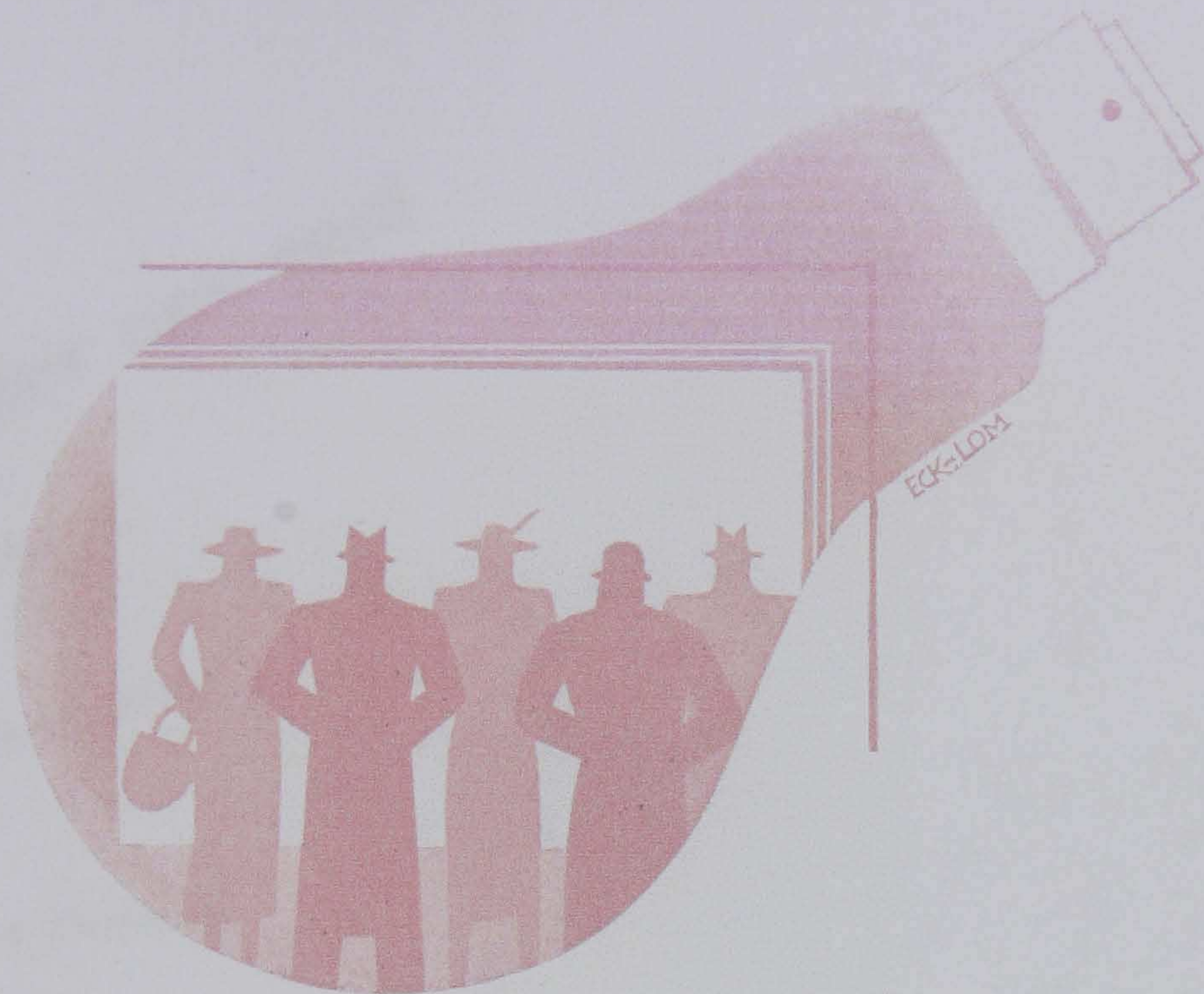
## FOR A PENNY A DAY

T6N.110.38

Figure 3.6 Advertisement in *Art and Industry*, April 1938, inside back cover.



## A PENNY A DAY—



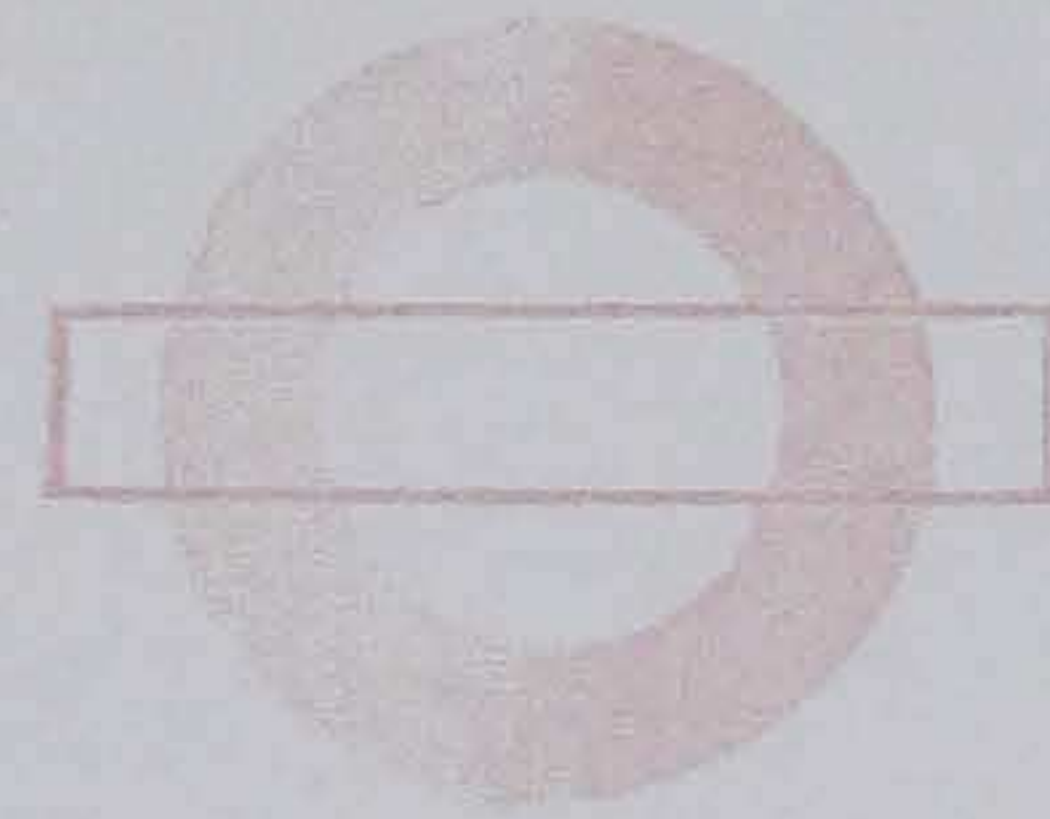
That's the cost of exhibiting a poster in an Underground car. For a penny a day a car becomes an additional shop window, with the lights on for 19 hours at no cost to you.

A million and a half people ride on the Underground daily. They ride in 3,160 cars, get in and out at 247 stations, live in 2,000,000 homes. All of them want to buy something from *somebody*. Why not put a salesman—your poster—among the shoppers?

### — FOR ANOTHER SHOP WINDOW

For poster advertising schemes of every sort and size apply to the Commercial Advertising Officer. It will cost you nothing to enquire, it will please him to give you all the information and help you want.

55 BROADWAY, LONDON, S.W.1. VICTORIA 6800



T6N.9.38

Figure 3.7 Advertisement in *Art and Industry*, March 1938, inside front cover.



2  
—at prices new to Grosvenor Street

VOGUE

**Under one roof**

<b>Model Room</b>	
<b>New York Room</b>	
<b>Country Clothes</b>	
<b>Lingerie Beauty Bar</b>	
<b>Model Hats Accessories</b>	

**rt**

**rose taylor ltd.** 60 GROSVENOR STREET MAY. 7851

Figure 3.8 Advertisement for Rose Taylor, *Vogue*, 13 October 1937, 2



# 8-HOUR DAY IN TOWN

## Harrods

Leave Toes to be plucked  
Beauty date at 10.15  
Must dictate Committee letters  
Hair and manicure  
Town suit: gloves, shoes.  
Hat, scarf to match

Two country hats  
Monkey for Leslie  
Annuals, herbaceous garden  
230 Decoration studio to fix  
East wing

Library list.  
Fabrics for dinner dress, blue  
Kitchen - 60. x saucepans



1. AT THE ZOO



2. DICTATES DURING HER "FACIAL"



3. NEW SOFT SHOES



4. THE GARDEN



5. PLANS FOR THE EAST WING



6. RESTOCKING THE KITCHEN



7. A NEW LIBRARY LIST

At last you've booked your day—for a trip to town. You simply had to. You want a spring suit. Your skin looks alarmingly post-winter. It's Leslie's birthday in a week. Emma is murmuring about the glasscloths. The sun-parlour wants redecorating. Your husband's pullovers are a sight. Old Crabtree says don't blame him if you have no cut flowers from the garden this summer.

"A day!" you think. "I need a month. It'll take me half a day just travelling from one place to another, from dress shop to beauty salon, on to a toy shop, a decorator's, a man's shop, a seedsman's, and so on." Yes, but need you? Probably you've no idea of the versatility of the modern "department store"—where you can cash cheques, have beauty treatments, choose from the latest Paris models, attend an auction, watch a Television programme, read and write letters, buy anything on earth from a candle to a cockatoo.

First, then, with a lot of shopping and a little time... we commend you to a large store. Second, we can't advise you too strongly to plan your day several days ahead... with as much care and cunning as if it were a trip to the tropics. List what you want to buy. If you're shopping for your family and house, make a note of all the necessary data. (Your husband's collar size, your children's measurements, the area of the lawn.) Collect fabric swatches of all your existing clothes, so that the things you buy will fit into your colour schemes.

Figure 3.9, '8-Hour Day in Town', *Vogue*, 16 March 1938, 92.



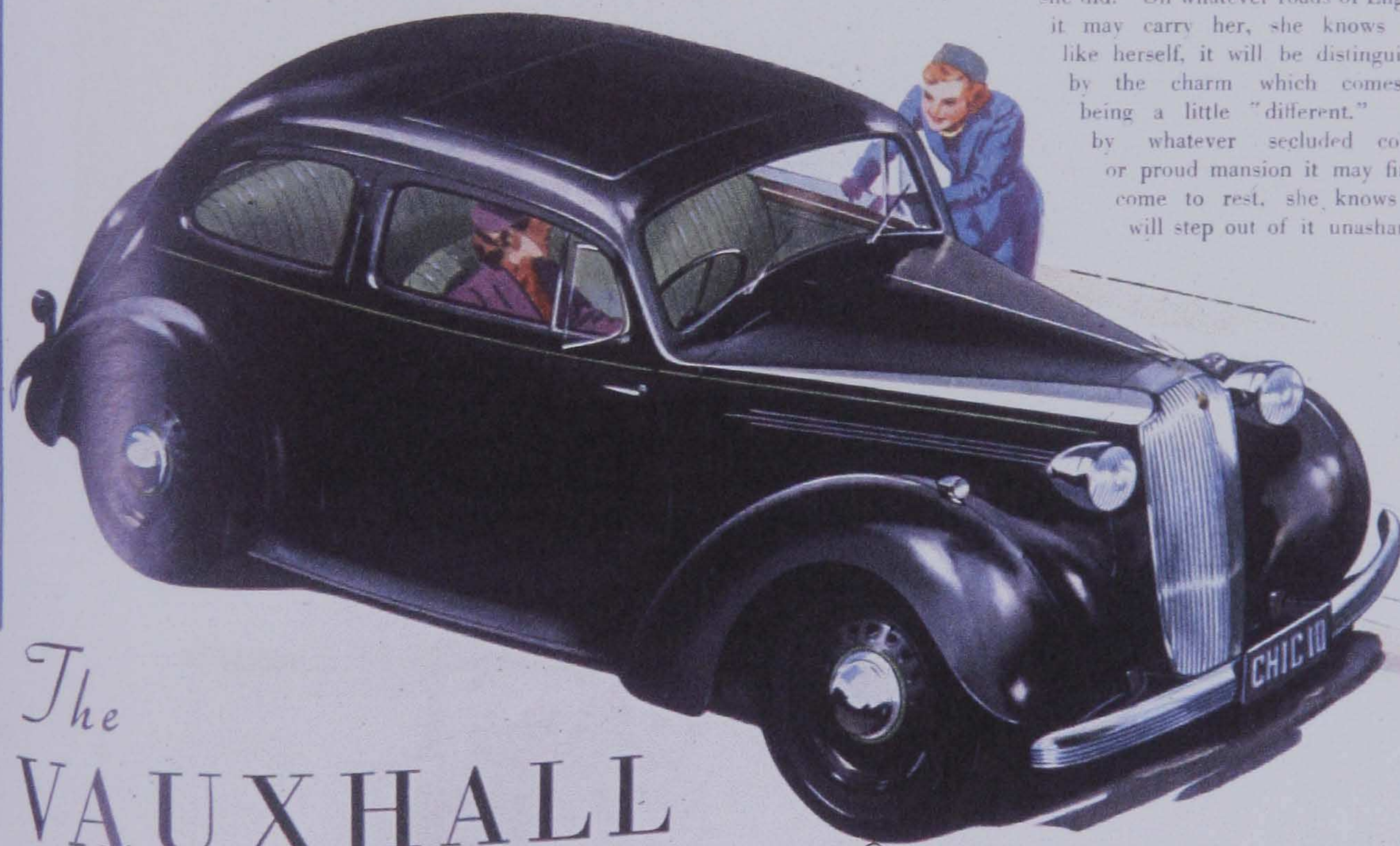
On the quaintest country lane,  
or in Fashionable Bond Street...

SHE WILL NEVER  
FEEL OUT OF PLACE



She chose all her belongings with the same discriminating care. There was about everything she did or possessed that touch of individuality which raised her, somehow, above the rut of ordinary mortals. Whether it was a pair of size threes to protect her diminutive feet, or yet another chic hat "to tie up her bonny brown hair," she exercised in their choice just that blend of imagination and modesty which we have learned to designate, for want of a better phrase, as "good taste." It was for this reason, primarily, that her choice of car fell on the Vauxhall Ten Coupé. Such features as Independent Springing, which seemed to turn the roughest roads into pile carpets, extreme petrol economy and the No-draught Ventilation which kept her as sweet and fresh as an evening in June throughout the longest journey, were, of course, not to be found on cars of other makes. But it was mainly on account of its clean, delicate lines and lovely finish that she unhesitatingly selected the car she did.

On whatever roads of England it may carry her, she knows that, like herself, it will be distinguished by the charm which comes of being a little "different." And by whatever secluded cottage or proud mansion it may finally come to rest, she knows she will step out of it unashamed.



The  
VAUXHALL

10 Coupé . . . £198

The Vauxhall 10 Coupé is available in six charming colour schemes: Black and Green (illustrated), Cream, Beige, Grey, Florador Blue and Black and Red. Ask your local Vauxhall dealer to show you the Coupé and demonstrate its 40 m.p.g. petrol economy. Write for an interesting booklet "From one lady to another" to Vauxhall Motors, Ltd., Luton.

THIS CAR TOOK A FIRST PRIZE IN THE COACHWORK COMPETITIONS DURING THE RECENT R.A.C. RALLY AT BLACKPOOL.

Figure 3.10 Advertisement for Vauxhall Cars, *Vogue*, June 8, 1938.



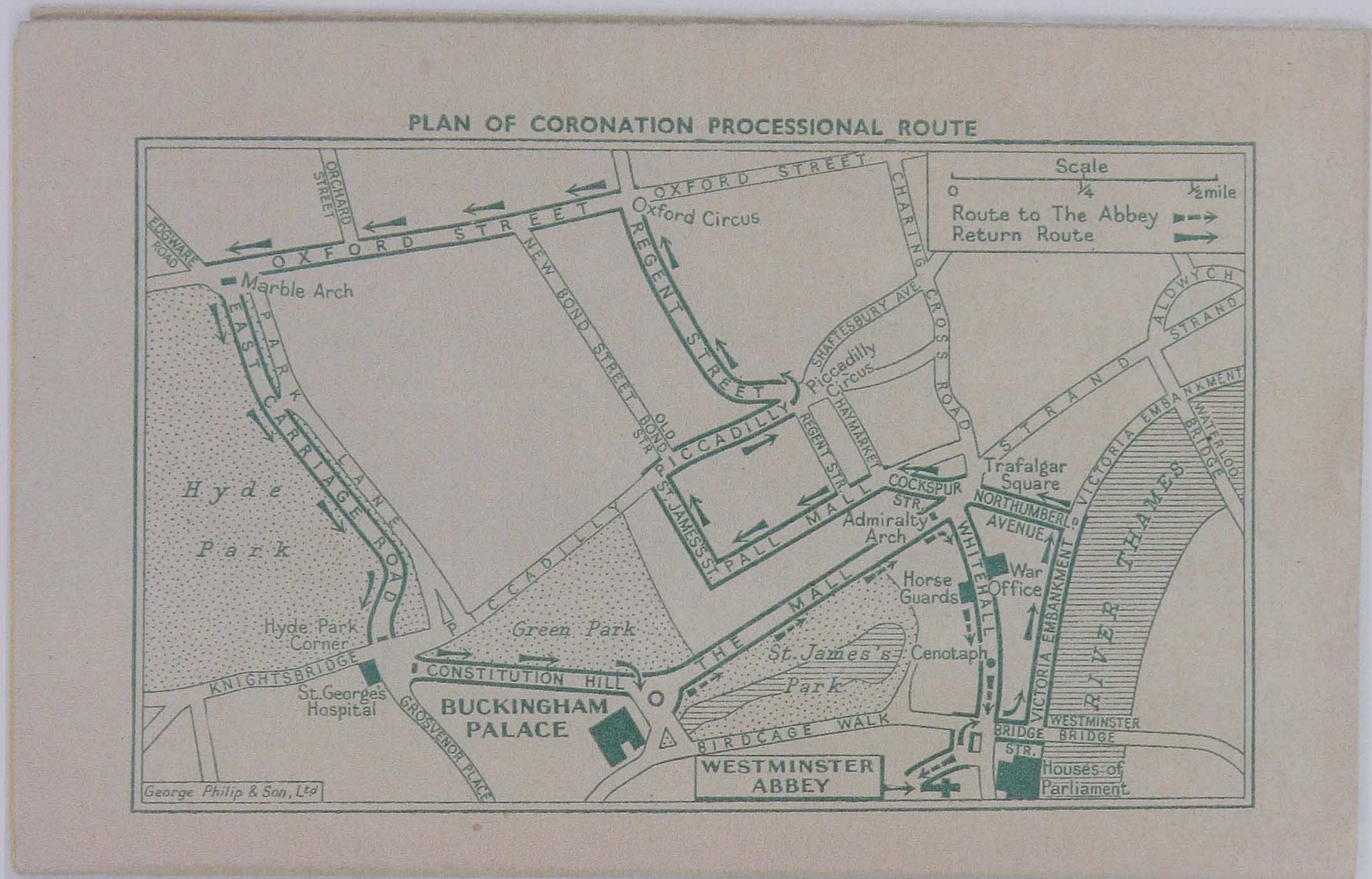


Figure 3.11 *How to See London: Coronation Edition*, 1937, back cover.



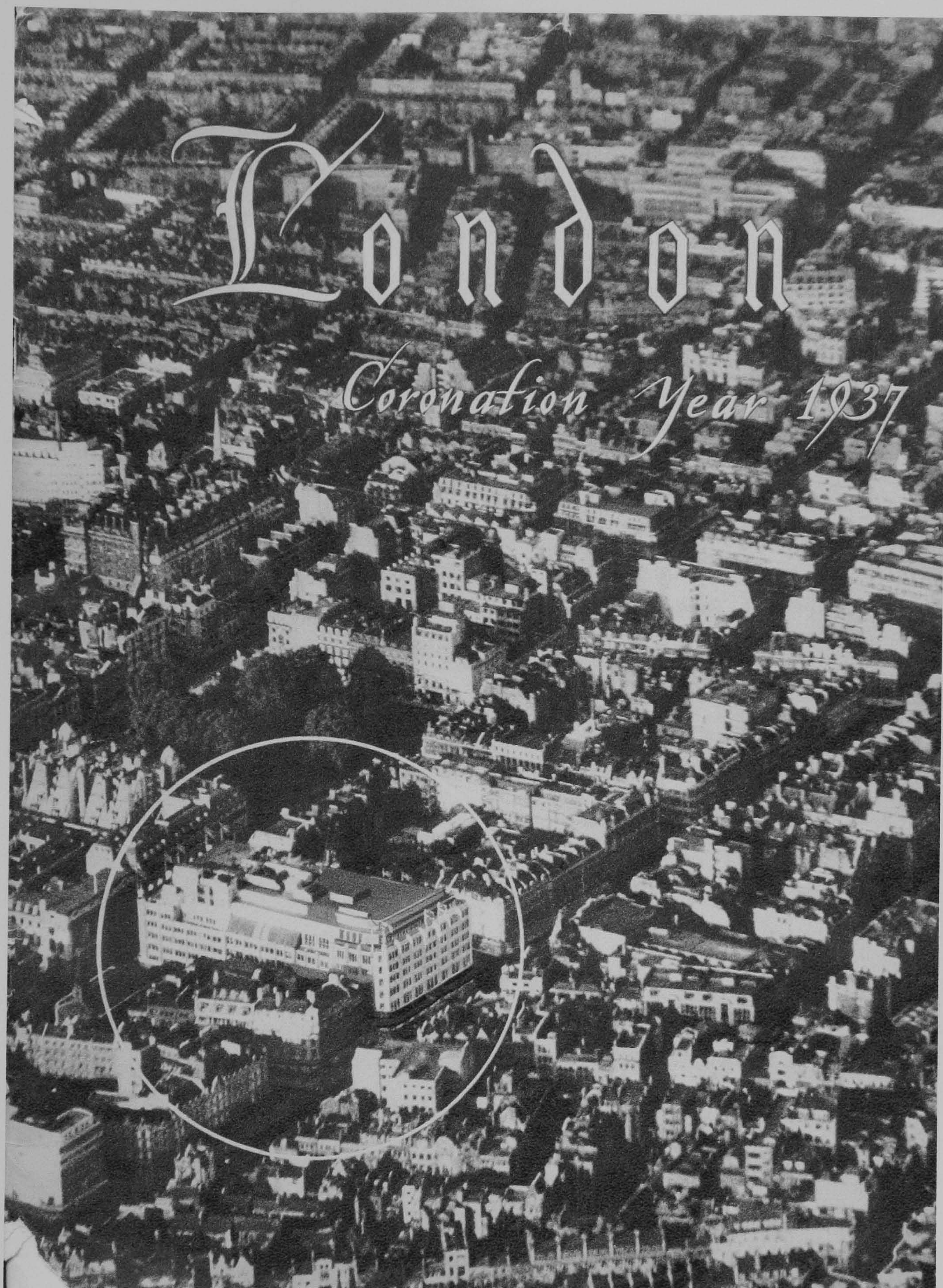


Figure 3.12 D. H. Evans brochure, 1937, front cover. John Lewis Partnership Archive Collection, 422/3.



**WE'RE GIVING AN OVERCOAT SHOW  
FOR MEN ABOUT REGENT STREET**

Overcoats. More overcoats. And still more overcoats. Formal coats and casual coats. Coats that clearly live in town, and coats that suit as clearly spend their time at country houses. Coats that can do both and get mucky with it. Coats that throw off a shower. Coats that could make a polar bear look pretty silly.

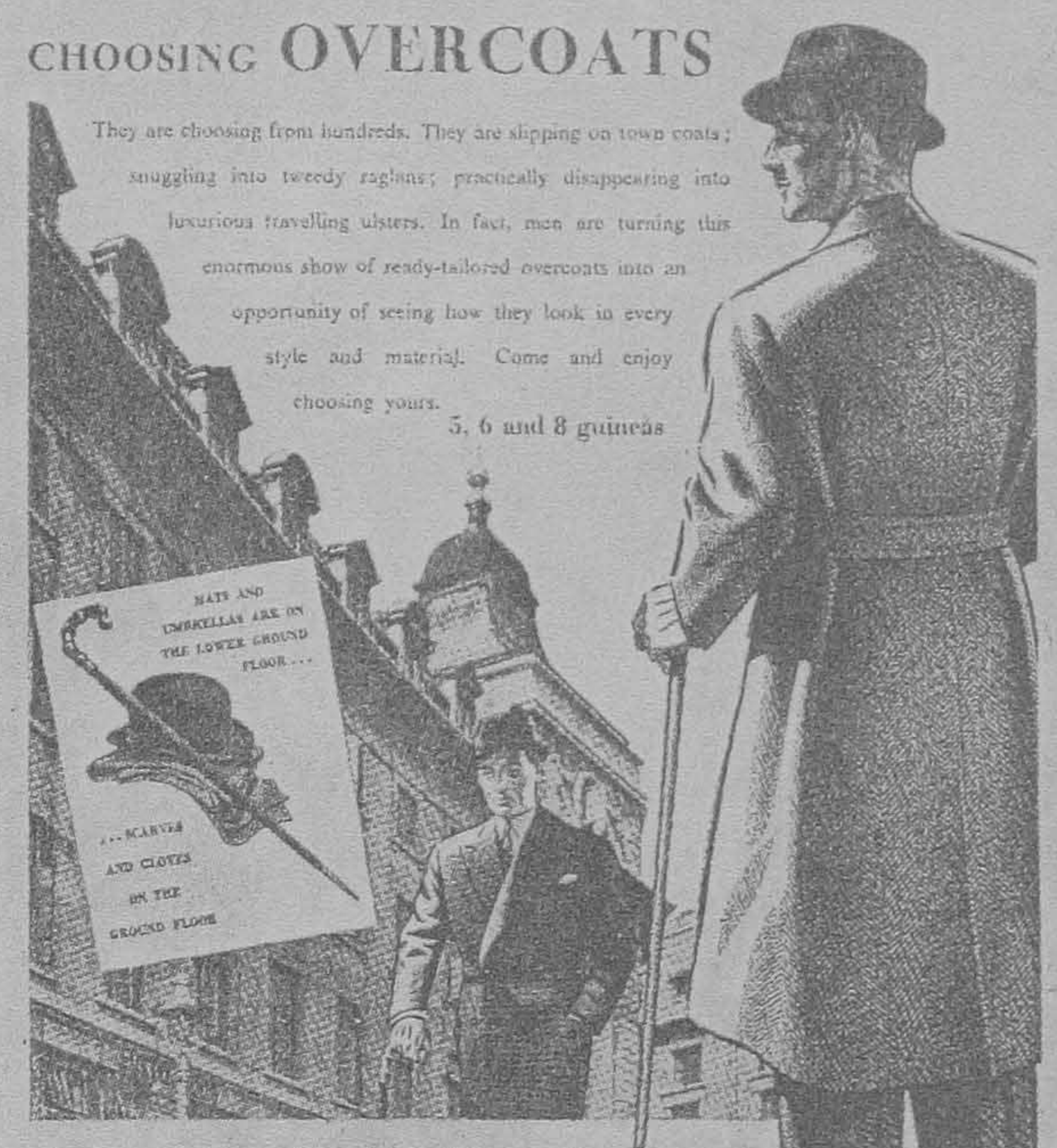
The greatest display of overcoats ever—all waiting for you to slip them on and see how you look in them. Handbooks that will fit you perfectly at five and six guineas and snow specially distinguished ones at eight. Come in for yours today.



**AUSTIN REED  
OF REGENT STREET**  
13 FENCHURCH STREET, E.C.3 • 77 CHEAPSIDE, E.C.2

**MEN ABOUT REGENT STREET ARE  
CHOOSING OVERCOATS**

They are choosing from hundreds. They are slipping on town coats; smuggling into tweedy raglans; practically disappearing into luxurious travelling ulsters. In fact, men are turning this enormous show of ready-tailored overcoats into an opportunity of seeing how they look in every style and material. Come and enjoy choosing yours. 5, 6 and 8 guineas



**AUSTIN REED  
OF REGENT STREET**  
13 FENCHURCH STREET, E.C.3 • 77 CHEAPSIDE, E.C.2

Figure 3.13 Austin Reed advertisements reproduced in *Art and Industry*, 1938, 85





## Free Delivery

D. H. Evans offer the most comprehensive free delivery service in London.

### THE INNER AREA

Any goods purchased at D. H. Evans are safely delivered by our own vans, entirely FREE OF CHARGE, to any address within the inner area of the map illustrated on right.

### THE OUTER AREA

Outside this van delivery radius, any goods (drapery or otherwise) are sent POST FREE OR CARRIAGE PAID to any address in the outer area of the map. Beyond the outer area, postage or carriage on goods other than drapery, is charged.



Page 22

Figure 3.14 D. H. Evans' free delivery and mail order shopping detailed in a brochure of 1937, 22. House of Fraser Archive, Glasgow University Archive, HF 11/15/7.





Figure 3.15 Swan and Edgar mail order catalogue of 1938, front cover.  
City of Westminster Archive, 381.1401294.





Figure 3.16 Pictorial map of the world by Stephen Bone, Piccadilly Circus underground station, December 1928, London Transport Museum.





Figure 3.17 Coronation edition of *Vogue*, 28 April 1937, front cover.





## NOW KNOWN AROUND THE WORLD

INTO London these days come flocking hundreds of lovely, sun-saturated women from their holiday hideaways — bent upon turning themselves immediately from careless summer beauties into creatures of radiant, formal loveliness... hurrying to one famous House in Bond Street as first step in the transformation.

Do you realise that in New York — Paris — Buenos Aires, almost all the world's smart capitals, a similar scene is taking place? That lovely women everywhere are hurrying to the outposts of this very English Complexion House for the same fine beauty products? Some of them have skins so smooth and petal-perfect you'd think they'd spent the summer wrapped in cellophane. Those are the fortunates who knew about Yardley — and took our summer beauty kit away with them. Others find their natural good looks overlaid with weathered skin — sun dryness — wrinkles and imperfections — and are hastening to us for the remedies. Just as you will, if you are not yet a Yardley user. For the perfection of these simple formulas has marked a new era in beauty practice.

All over the world women have accepted them immediately as the last word in skin care technique. Yardley's century-old skill as fine perfumers ensures their exquisite purity and delicacy. And Yardley science has reduced them to the very minimum of fussiness — and time-consuming treatments.

One single preparation (varied, of course, for each skin type or special problem) has been created for each important skin-beautifying factor: cleansing — nourishing — stimulation.

The result is a fine, firm, youthful complexion — within the reach of every woman. For no matter how busy you are, you can spend the few minutes a day at home this régime requires. And although there can be no finer, Yardley things are so widely used, they're far from costly at your own chemist, shop or coiffeur.

Let experts in our Bond Street Salon prescribe correctly for your skin, and show you the simple new application method which enables you to secure for yourself results as delightful as a beauty specialist's. Call in — or send for the free, entrancing new book in colour, "Beauty Secrets from Bond Street," with the same information. Find out about this world-wide beauty renaissance today!

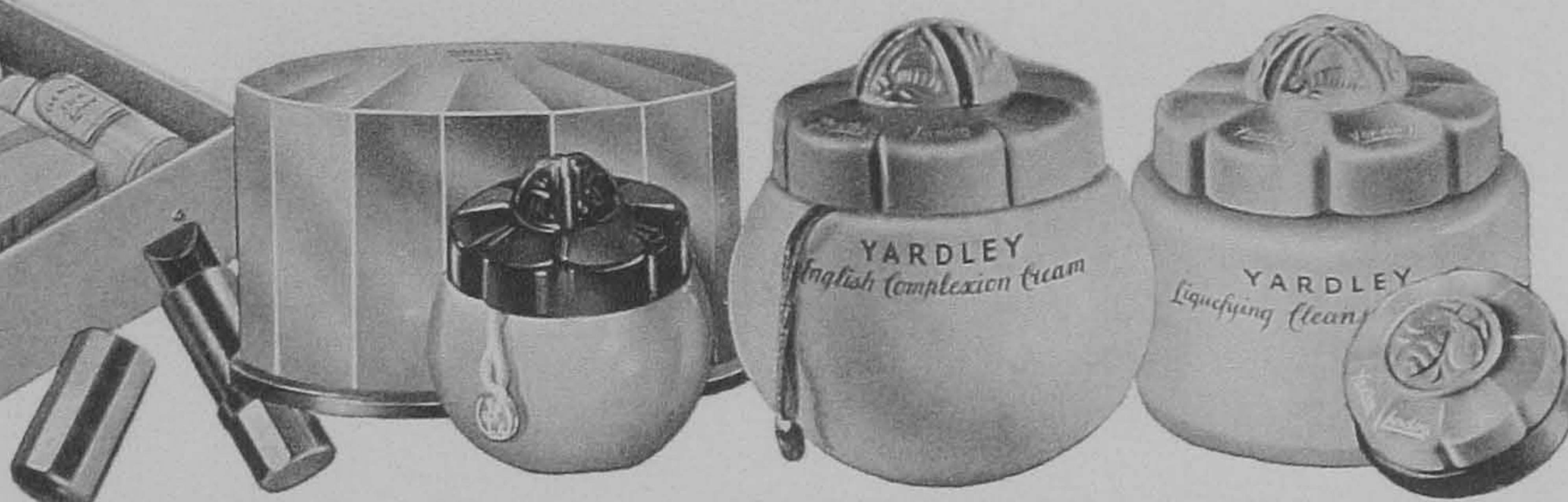


FOR SKIN CARE: English Complexion Cream, 3/6 (triple size 7/6); Liquefying Cleansing Cream cleanses pores, removes make-up, 3/6 (triple size 7/6); Toning Lotion, 2/6 (triple size 5/6); Skin Food, 3/6 (triple size 7/6); Skin Lotion, 2/6 (triple size 5/6); Foundation Cream, 2/6; Trial Beauty Boxes, for each type of skin, 5/6. FOR MAKE-UP: Rouge Cream, 2/-; Lipstick, 3/-; Eyeshadow, 2/-; and Nail Enamel, 1/6.



### THE YARDLEY BEAUTY SALON 33 Old Bond Street

Yardley beauty treatments by skilled operators, 5/6, 10/6 and 15/6. Call in anytime for a fresh outlook on loveliness.



**YARDLEY, 33, OLD BOND STREET, LONDON, W.1**

Figure 3.18 Yardley advertisement, *Vogue* 16 September 1936, 1.



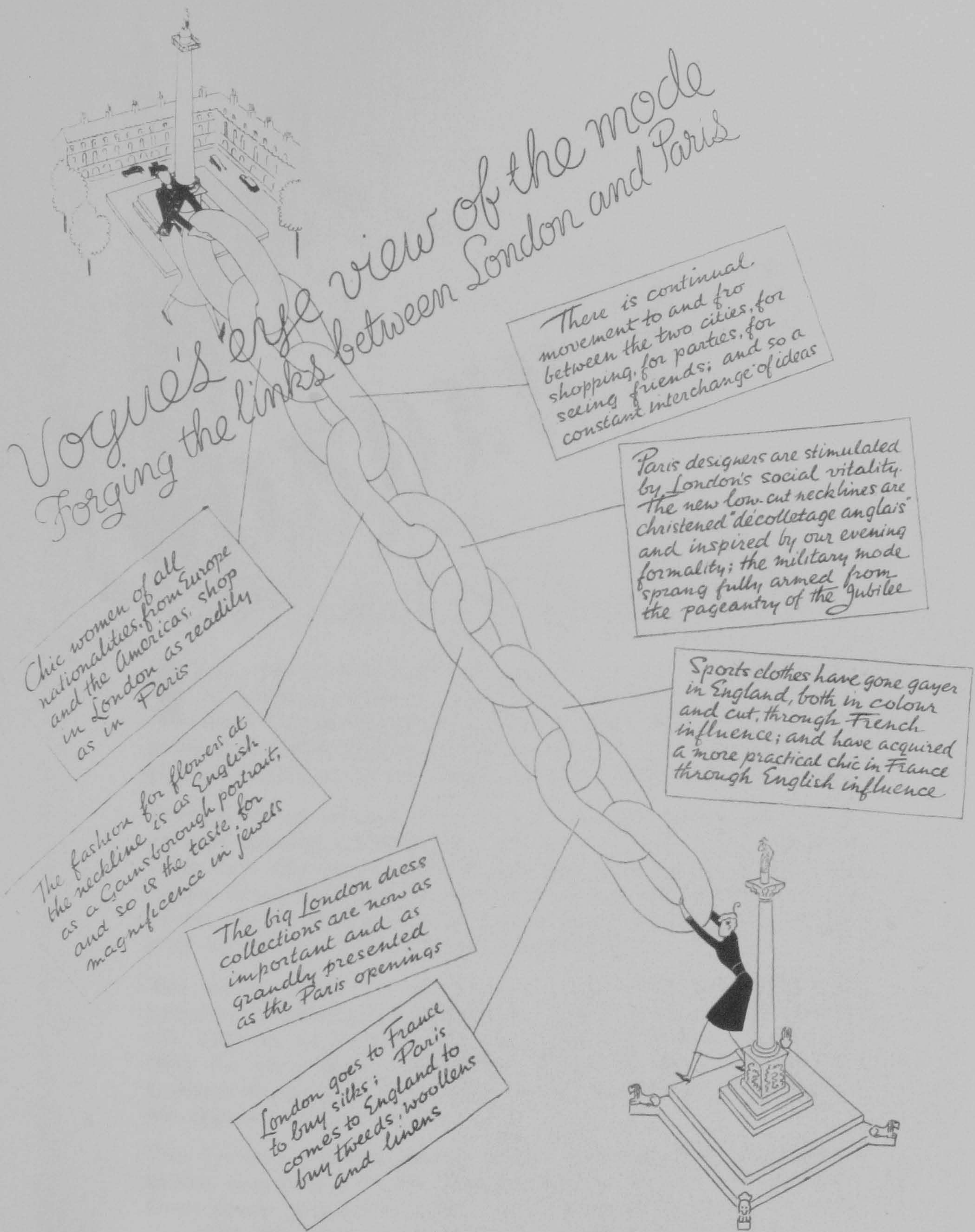


Figure 3.19 'Vogue's eye view of the mode: forging the links between London and Paris', *Vogue*, September 18, 1935, 57.





**I**T is impossible to get the best out of so vast a metropolis as London without a guide ; but as couriers frequently, even though unconsciously, infringe upon one's personal privacy and liberty, this little booklet has been designed as a pocket catalogue of London's principal attractions.

Certain times of day have to be seized in order to capture various aspects peculiar to London life, and to see them at their best advantage, such as the noonday shopping cavalcade in the West End, afternoon on the River, and evening at one of the scores of theatres or hotels which both literally bristle with social and professional celebrities.

The visitor must acquaint himself with such events as Polo matches at Ranelagh ; Cricket at Lord's ; Racing at Sandown ; the Regatta at Henley ; Golf on one of the fine courses ; so that he does not miss any of these unique dates in the London diary of social events which happen to occur during his sojourn in the capital.

The London Season boasts of its own peculiar attractions, unlike any others in the world, and the visitor will discover from these pages "what's on and where" in order to make the visit the most memorable of all possible holidays.

---

Bishopsgate Institute

Figure 3.20 *London the Wonder City*, the Pullman Car Company, 1937, 7.



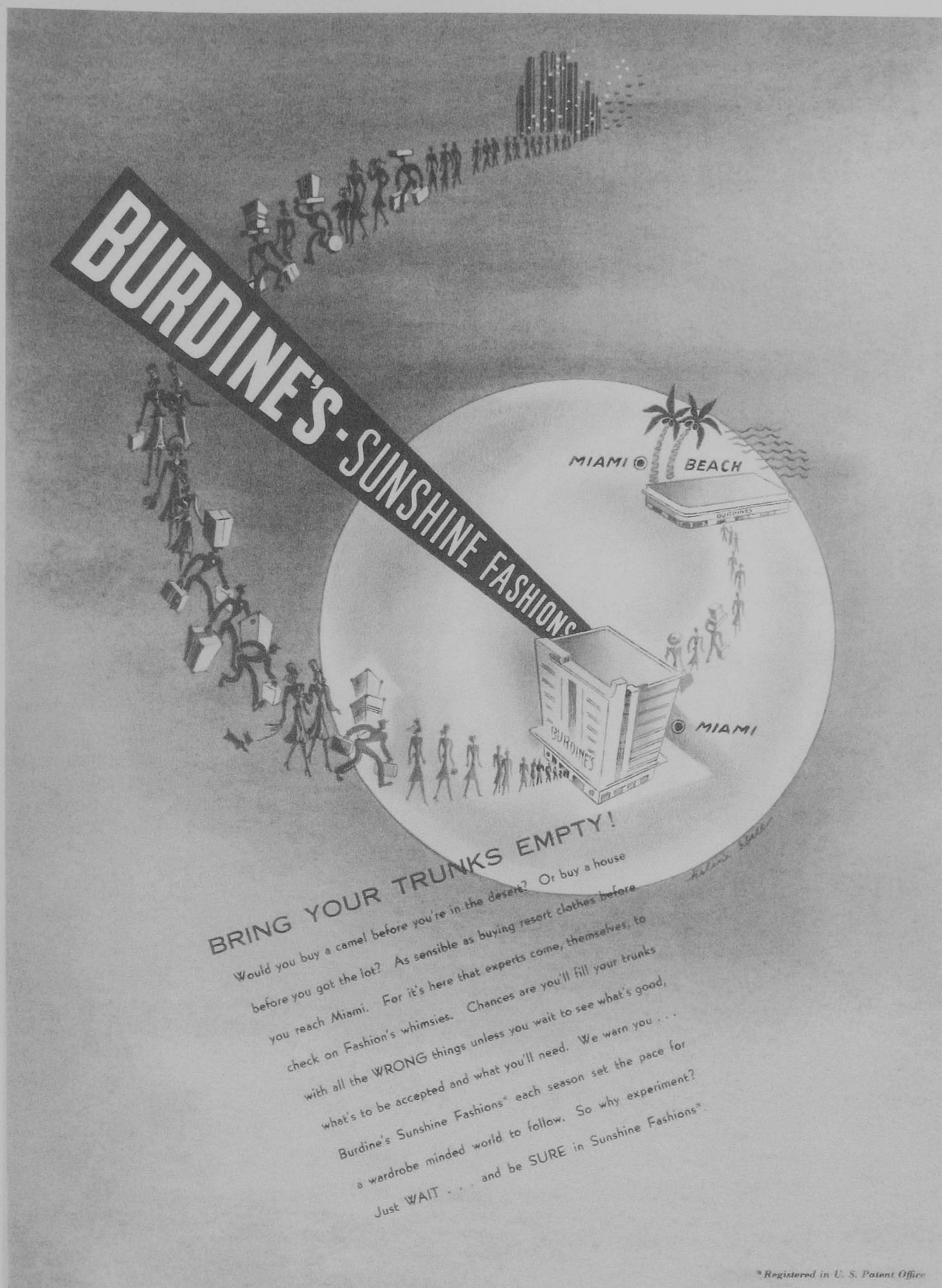


Figure 3.21 Advertisement for Burdine's Sunshine Fashions, *Vogue* (New York), 15 January 1940, 9.





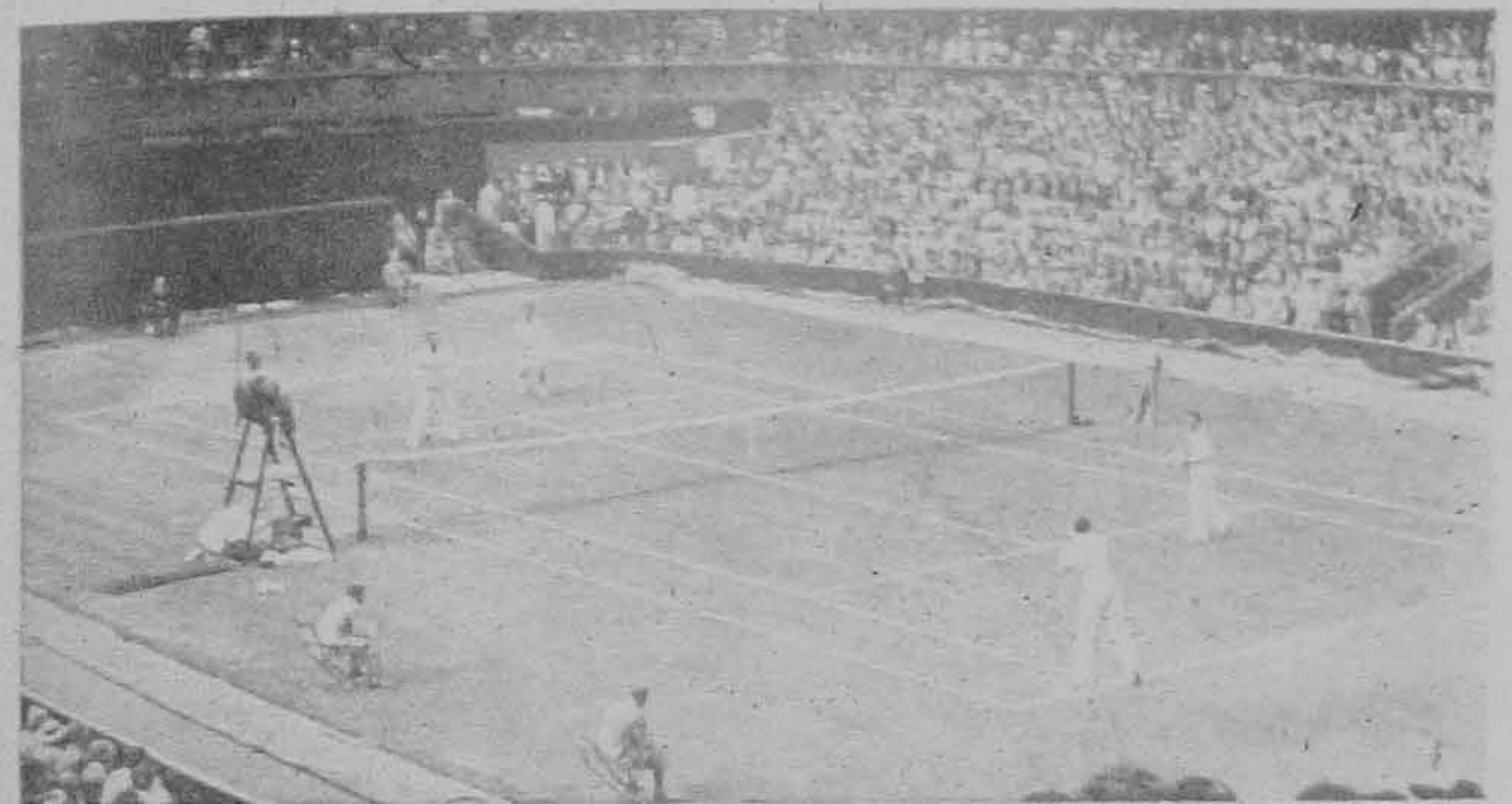
### From Horses to Horse-power

*A famous and old established coach-builder's shop in St. James's Street.*



### Oxford Street at Night

48



### International Lawn Tennis at Wimbledon

*The international lawn tennis championships at the end of June are one of the great sporting events of the London season.*

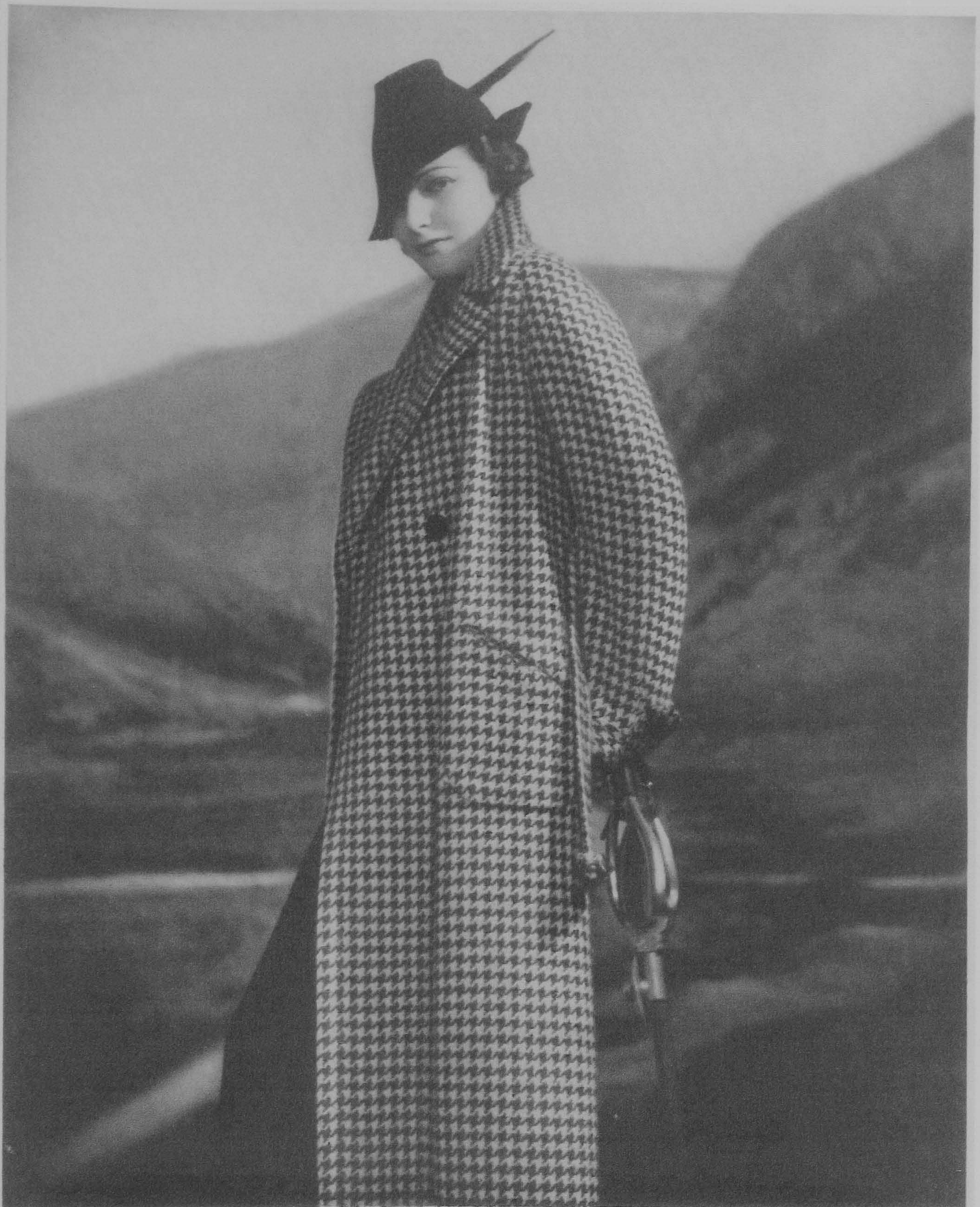


### 'The Play's the Thing'—A Theatre Queue

49

Figure 3.22 W. D. H. McCullough, *London*, London: The Travel and Industrial Development Association of Great Britain and Ireland, 1938, 48-9.





TUNBRIDGE

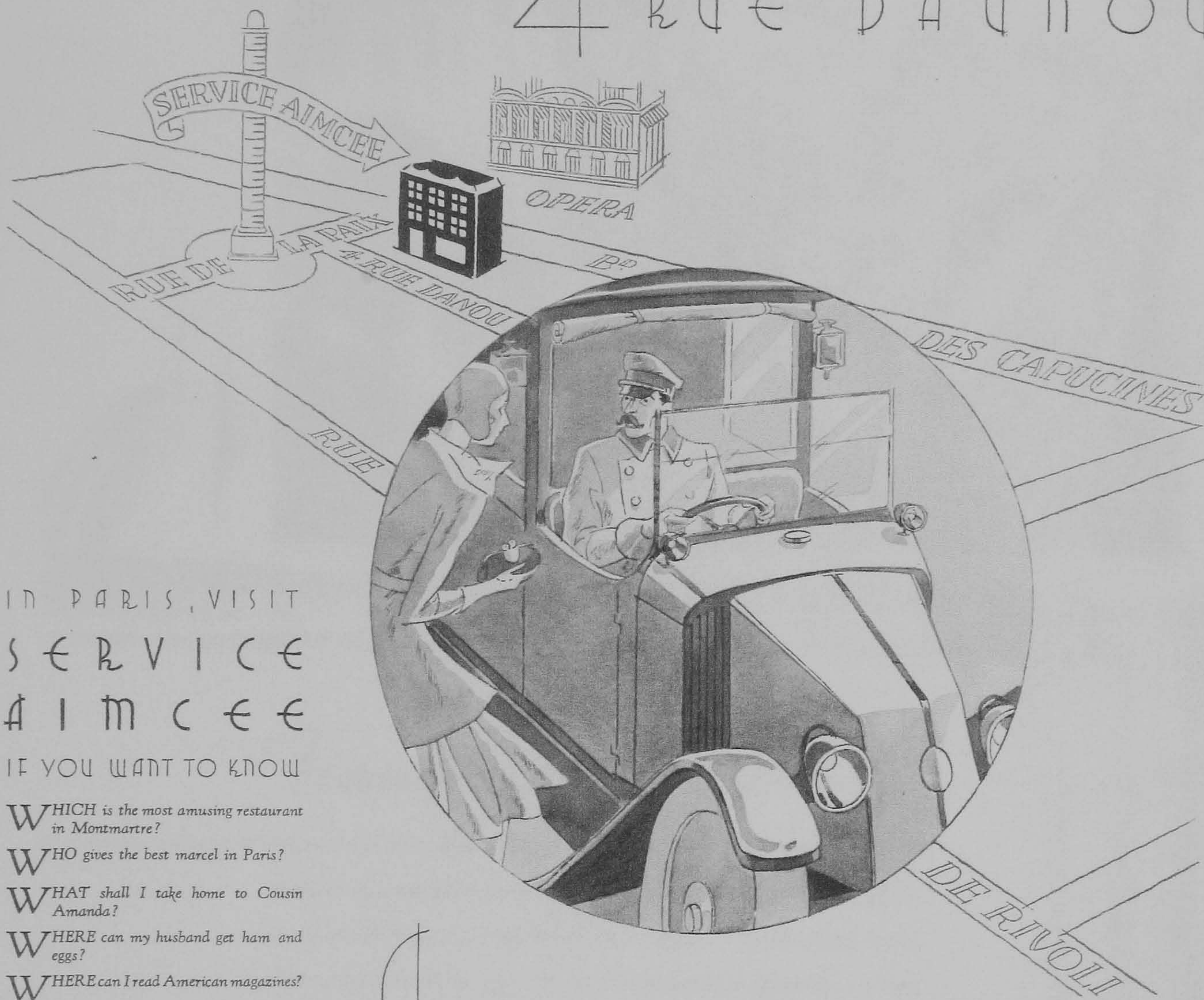
Cet élégant et fort pratique manteau de sport et de voyage, en beau tweed anglais, a été choisi dans la très importante et très attrayante collection "Rodex" dont Old England, 12, boulevard des Capucines, possède l'exclusivité

Old England

Figure 3.23 Advertisement for 'Old England', *Vogue* (Paris), June 1935, 77.



DITES AU CHAUFFEUR  
"4 RUE DAUNOU"



IN PARIS, VISIT  
SERVICE  
AIMCEE  
IF YOU WANT TO KNOW

WHICH is the most amusing restaurant  
in Montmartre?  
WHO gives the best marcel in Paris?  
WHAT shall I take home to Cousin  
Amanda?  
WHERE can my husband get ham and  
eggs?  
WHERE can I read American magazines?  
WHAT "little" dressmaker in Paris  
combines real style with moderate prices?  
WHERE shall I have my mail sent?  
WHERE can I make reservations for:  
theatre tickets . . . wagons lits . . .  
steamer accommodations . . . airplane flights  
. . . sightseeing tours. . . automobile jaunts?  
DOES it pay to take an apartment for the  
season and how do I go about finding one?

A centrally located, intelligently planned, helpfully staffed information and guidance office, with the American point of view, for American visitors in Paris. Questions answered, reservations made, advice given—entirely without charge\* or tip. Service Aimcee was established by the representative American stores listed below, to give free service to their patrons while in Paris, but it welcomes warmly all expatriates—and makes them feel at home.

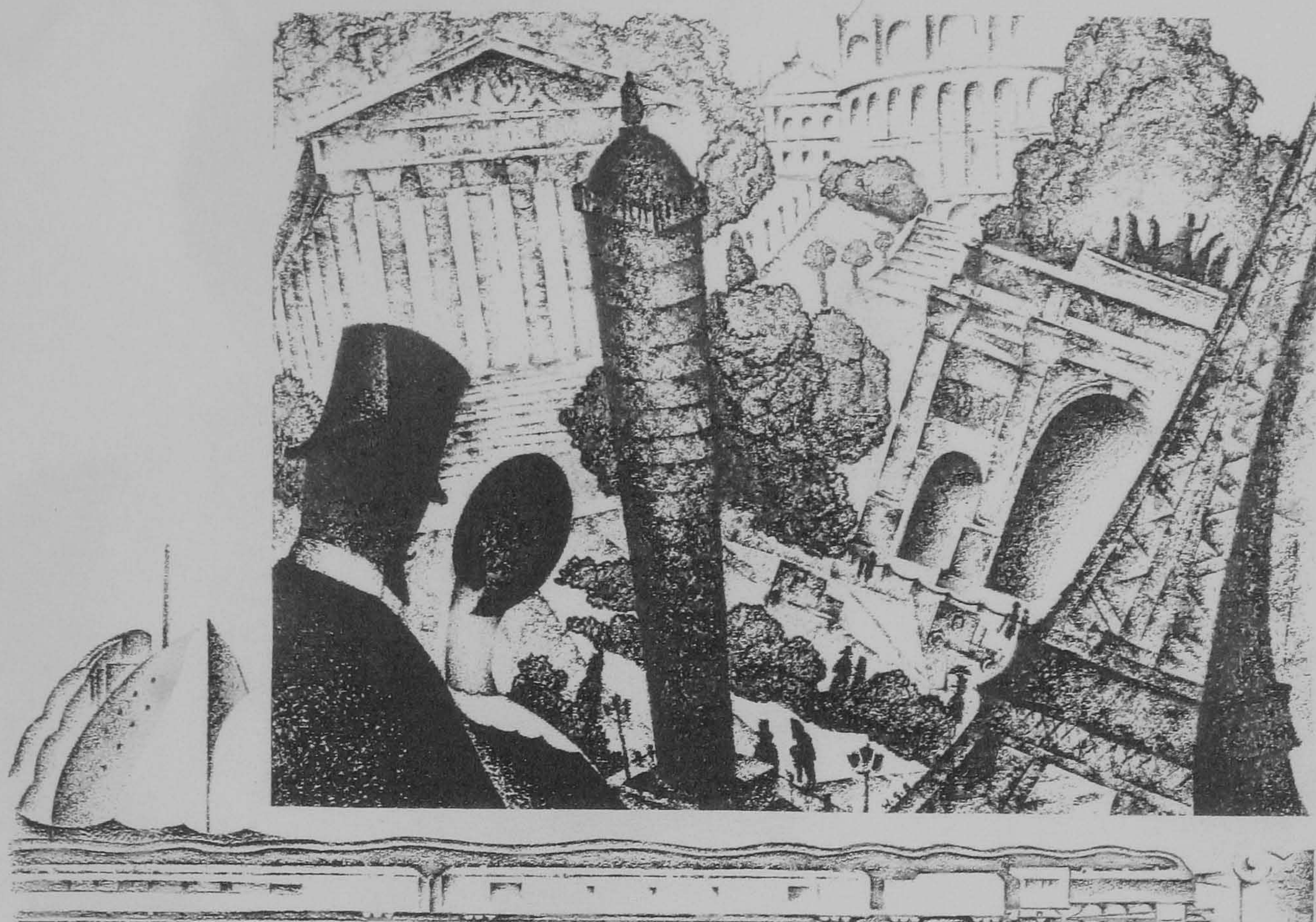
Timid beginner or hardened habitu , let your first direction to a Paris taxicab driver be, "4 Rue Daunou."

\*There is a small fee for interpreters or shoppers by the hour

BARBARA LEE FASHIONS FOR WOMEN AND MISSES ARE SHOWN EXCLUSIVELY AT THE SHOPS LISTED HERE			
Brooklyn, N. Y.	Minneapolis, Minn.	Detroit, Mich.	Cincinnati, Ohio
ABRAHAM & STRAUS, INC.	THE DAYTON CO.	THE J. L. HUDSON CO.	THE JOHN SHILLITO CO.
Indianapolis Ind.	San Francisco, Calif.	Baltimore, Md.	St. Louis, Mo.
L. S. AYRES & CO.	THE EMPORIUM	HUTZLER BROTHERS CO.	STIX, BAER & FULLER CO.
Los Angeles, Calif.	Boston, Mass.	Columbus, Ohio	Philadelphia, Pa.
BULLOCK'S	WM. FILENE'S SONS CO.	THE F. & R. LAZARUS & CO.	STRAWBRIDGE & CLOTHIER
Oakland, Calif.	Rochester, N. Y.	Dayton, Ohio	Cleveland, Ohio
THE H. C. CAPWELL CO.	B. FORMAN CO.	THE RIKE-KUMLER CO.	THE WM. TAYLORSON & CO.
	Pittsburgh, Pa.		
	JOSEPH HORNE CO.		

Figure 3.24 Advertisement for the Service Aimcee, *Vogue* (New York), 4 January 1930, 5.





## *Transplanting Paris*

At a famous numero of the rue de la Paix, appraising eyes review passing creations . . . Somewhere on the rue St. Honoré a man who has bought millions of gloves for us selects several of the better new styles . . . One shrewd young man knows where to go in Paris for marvelous costume jewelry; another for hosiery more sheer than shadows; another for tapestries that few may own but none fail to admire. • These are some of Marshall Field and Company's large staff of resident representatives in Paris. In addition, scores of men and women from Field's in Chicago visit Paris periodically. Alert, fashion-wise, their purchases reflect an intimate knowledge of Continental correctness. • You are cordially invited to come to Field's for almost anything you might like from Paris.

## *Marshall Field and Company*

RETAIL • CHICAGO



Figure 3.25 Advertisement Marshall Field, *Vogue* (New York), 24 May 1930, 5.





Figure 3.26 Front cover of *Vogue* (New York), 12 April 1930.



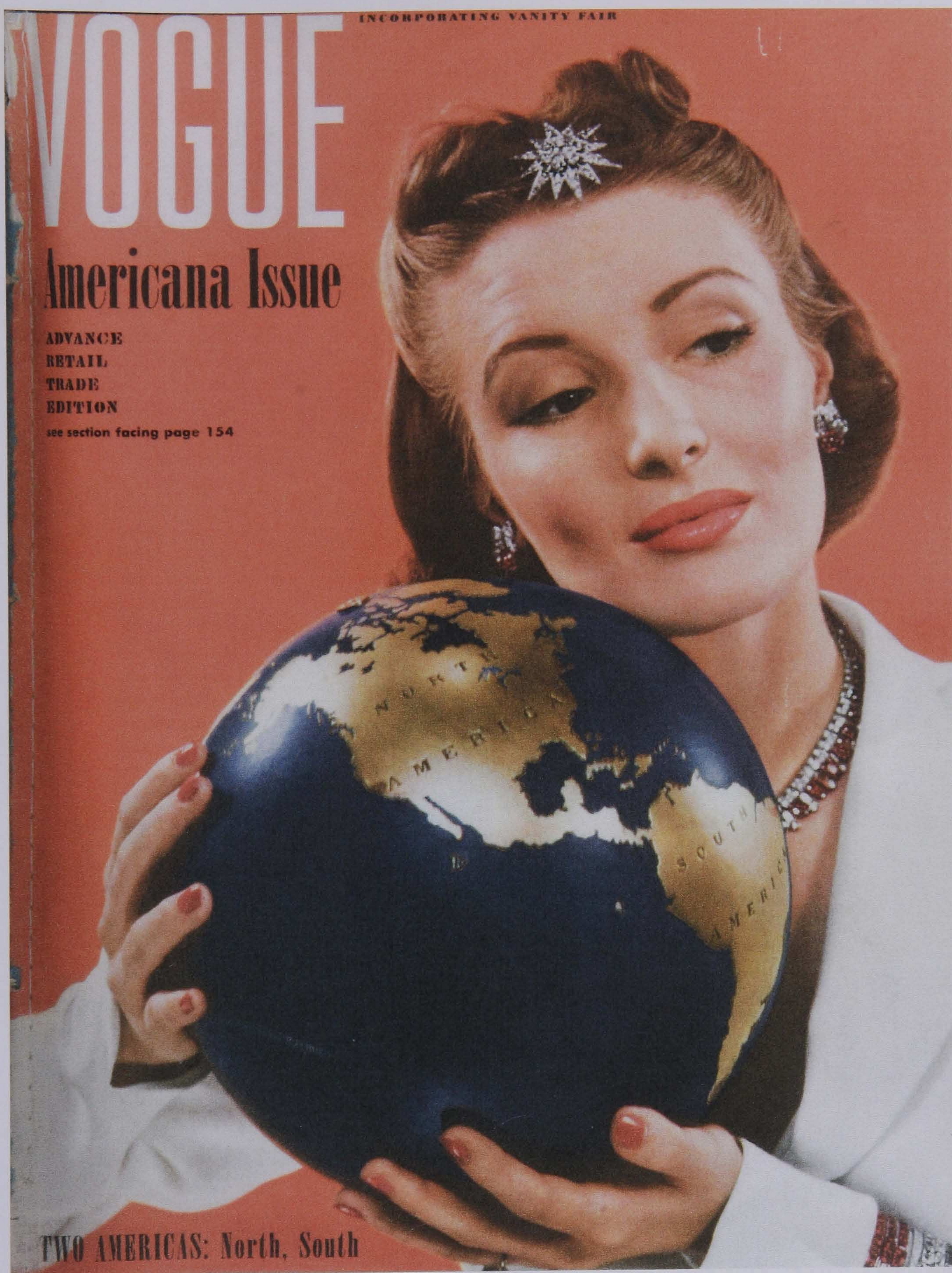


Figure 3.27 Front cover of *Vogue* (New York), 1 February 1940.



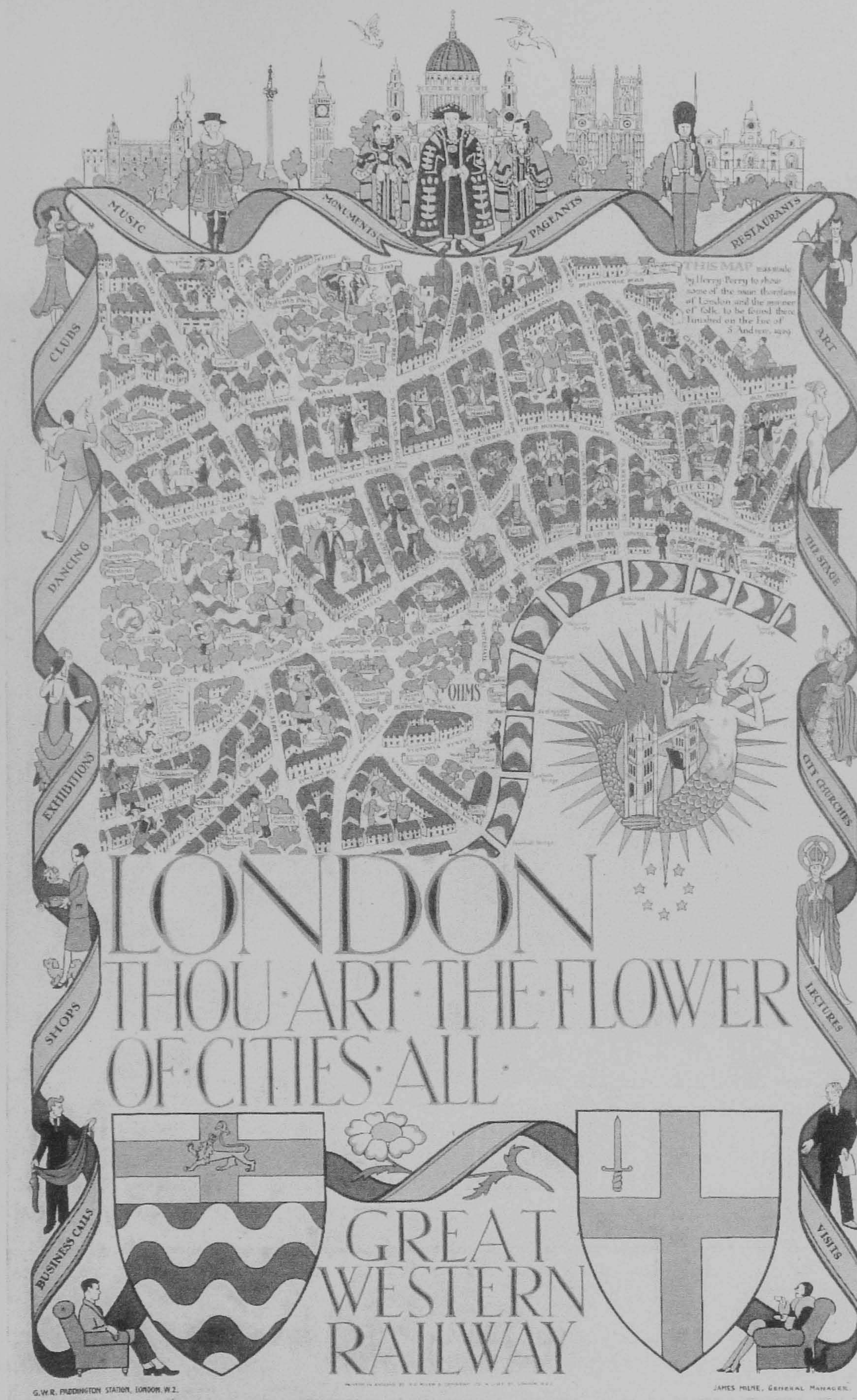


Figure 4.1 Great Western Railway poster reproduced in *Commercial Art*, March 1931, 127.





Figure 4.2 Austin Reed advertisement, *Art and Industry*, July 1939, 10.





REFERENCE			
THE MAP IS DIVIDED INTO QUARTER-MILE SQUARES			
Hotels & Restaurants	■	Theatres, Cinemas etc.	■
Business Houses etc.	▨	Embassies, Consulates etc.	□
Clubs	□	Tube Stations	○
One-way Traffic	→	Parking Places	■

Figure 4.3 Extracts from *The Daily Sketch New Visitors' and Motorists' Plan of Central London*, 1927. Cambridge University Library.





Figure 4.4 Postcard, 1944, City of Westminster Archive, D133/151.





Figure 4.5 Regent Street, 1930s, National Monuments Record.





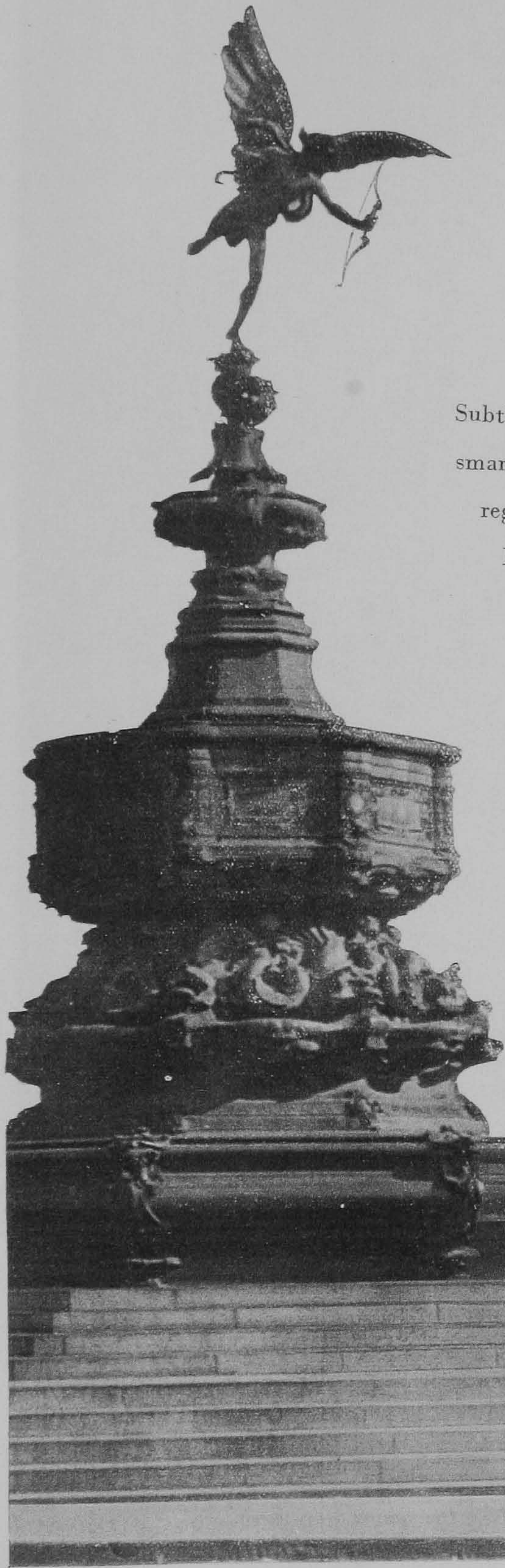
Figure 4.6 Pedestrians passing Flemings restaurant, 301-7 Oxford Street, c.1930, National Monuments Record.





Figure 4.7 Piccadilly Circus c.1940, National Monuments Record.





# LONDON FASHIONS

in the next

# VOGUE

Subtly different from those of Paris or New York, you'll agree. Just as smart. Just as much in tune with the mode. But with rather more regard for practicality. And rather better suited to the British scene!

But can you pick your way through the dozens of lovely things shown at the London collections? Can you tell at a glance which mode has come to stay . . . which clothes have a fashion future? If you're the least bit doubtful—then you need the next *Vogue*!

*Vogue* shops and shops and shops. *Vogue* sees everything there is to see—and then selects with perfect taste, unerring judgment, the chic, practical clothes that *you* will want to wear. You will find the "Limited Incomes" section in this issue particularly helpful. A morning frock as the "Bargain of the Fortnight," hats of great chic but modest price, *Vogue*

Patterns and a knitting feature—these are just some of the ways in which *Vogue* will help you to practise dress economy—and not look it!

ON SALE APRIL 3 • PRICE 1/-

Printed in Great Britain for the Proprietors, THE CONDÉ NAST PUBLICATIONS LTD., by W. H. SMITH & SON LTD., The Arden Press, Stamford Street, S.E. 1, and published by the Proprietors, 1 New Bond Street, London, W.1. Registered for the Canadian Magazine Post.

Figure 4.8 Back cover, *Vogue*, 20 March 1935.



# Bond Street

THE NEW PERFUME BY YARDLEY

A new and most glamorous Perfume created from rich and rare essences, with a note of luxury and elegance in tune with the famous Street of Fashion which gives it its name. As a fitting accompaniment to the approaching period of ceremony and splendour Bond Street Perfume will be worn by all those whose taste and discernment have marked them as leaders of Fashion. 7/6 : 12/6 : 21/- Yardley, 35 Old Bond Street, London, W.1

Figure 4.9 Yardley Advertisement, *London: the Wonder City*, The Pullman Car Company, 1937.





A NEW SHOP, NO. 2, NEW BOND STREET, W.  
LIEUT.-COLONEL H. P. CART DE LAFONTAINE, F.R.I.B.A., and M. HENRI MAZET, D.P.L.G., Architects.

Figure 4.10 Coty, New Bond Street, *The Builder*, 14 December 1934, 1024.





Messrs. Lincoln Bennett & Co., Ltd., 3 Burlington Gardens, W.

Figure 4.11 A. S. Bridgeland and F. W. Alcock, *Window Dressing for Tailors, Outfitters etc*, London: Tailor and Cutter, c.1930.



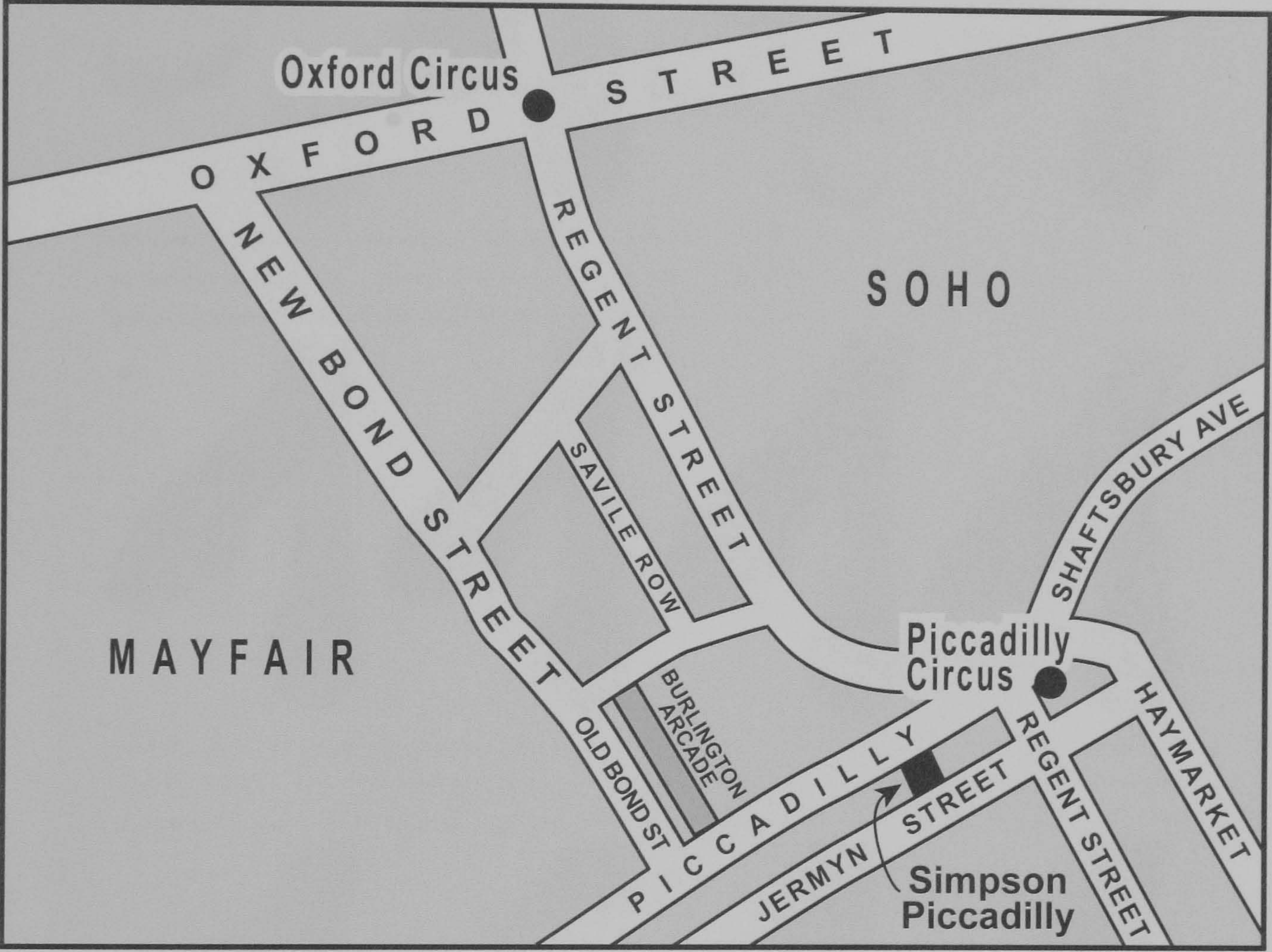
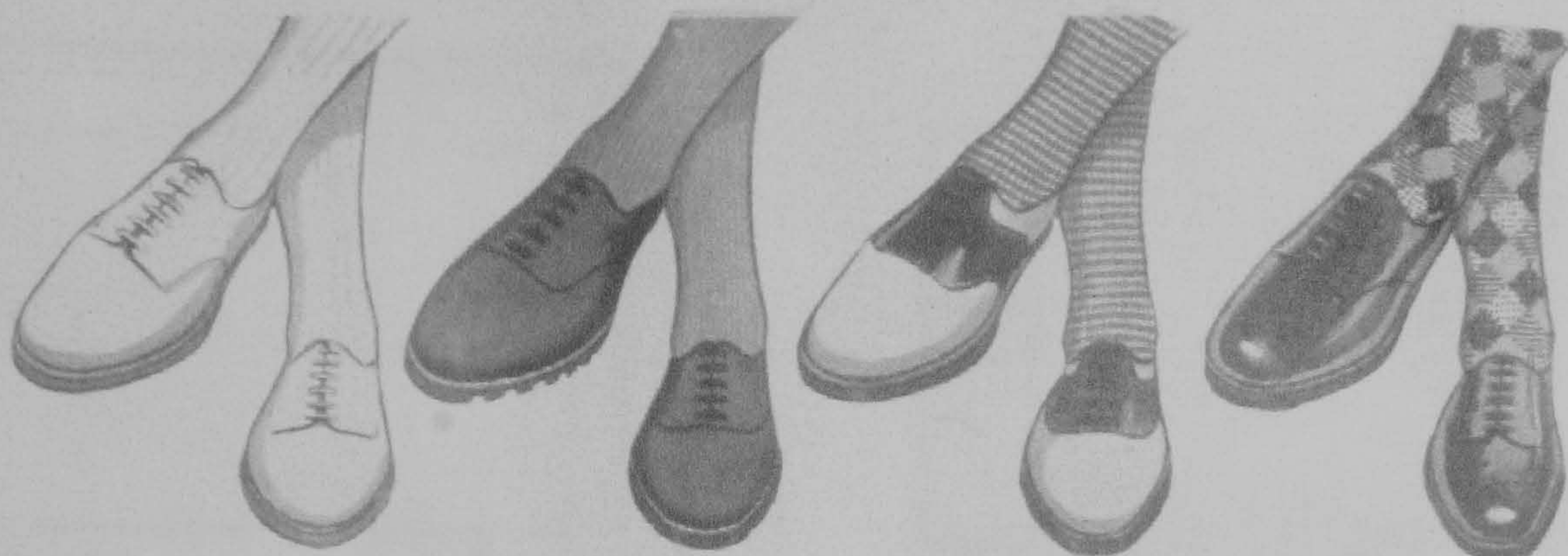


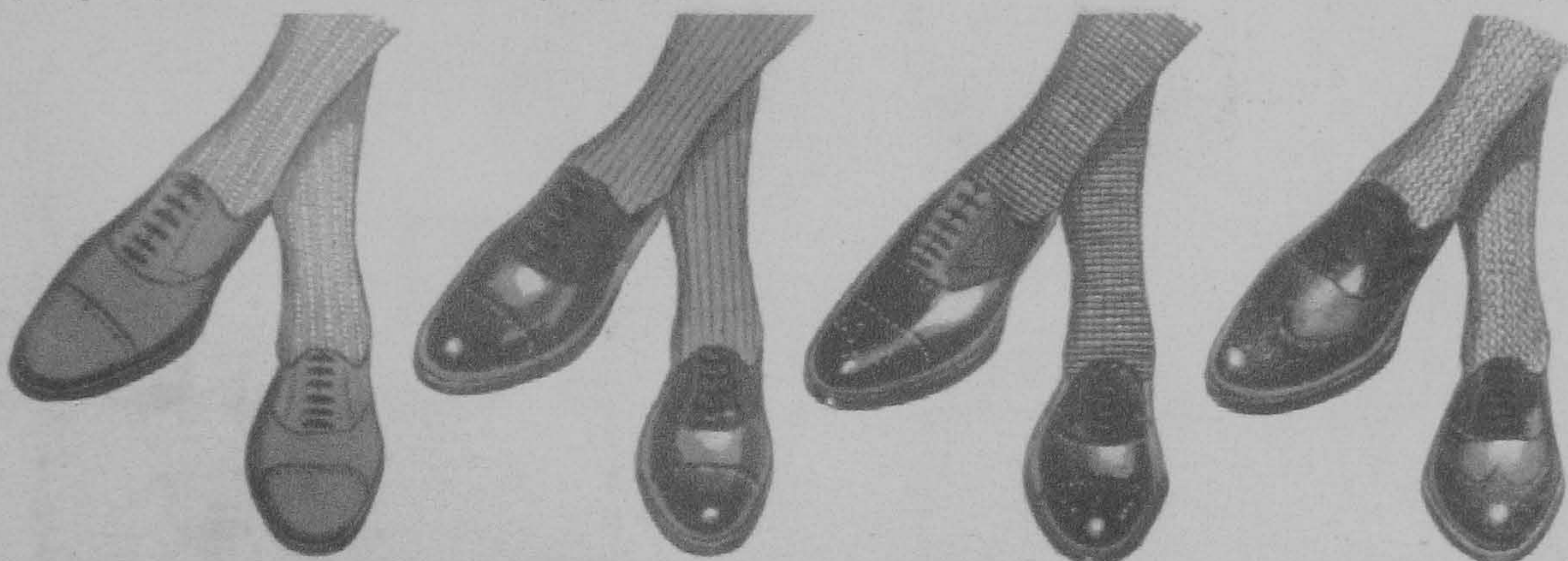
Figure 4.12 Street plan showing the position of Simpsons.



# Shoes and Socks



**LEISURE** People tell us that the floor they like best at Simpson's is the Lower Ground. Whether that's because the snack bar is there, we don't know. But we do know that our shoe shop is there, too—and that it's a pretty remarkable place. The four pairs pictured above are good examples from our immense selection of holiday shoes. They cost between 25/- and 50/-



**TOWN** This row contains suggestions for more formal occasions. The pair on the left are in brown suede, the next in calf—the others are in willow. Their prices run from 30/- up to 50/-. We ought also, at this point, to mention socks, of which we have a very large variety running in price from as high as 15/6 down to 3/6. You will find them all very excellent!



**EVENING** Simpsons show several styles in which evening shoes may permissibly be fashioned. A more recent one, which several well-dressed men have been much taken with, is that on the extreme right. It is what we call a "two-tie," which gives a long front to the shoe—and, as a patent Oxford, we sell it at 42/- . Worth coming in to see, when next you're passing.

Figure 4.13 Simpsons Advertisement, *The Sketch*, 1 July 1936.



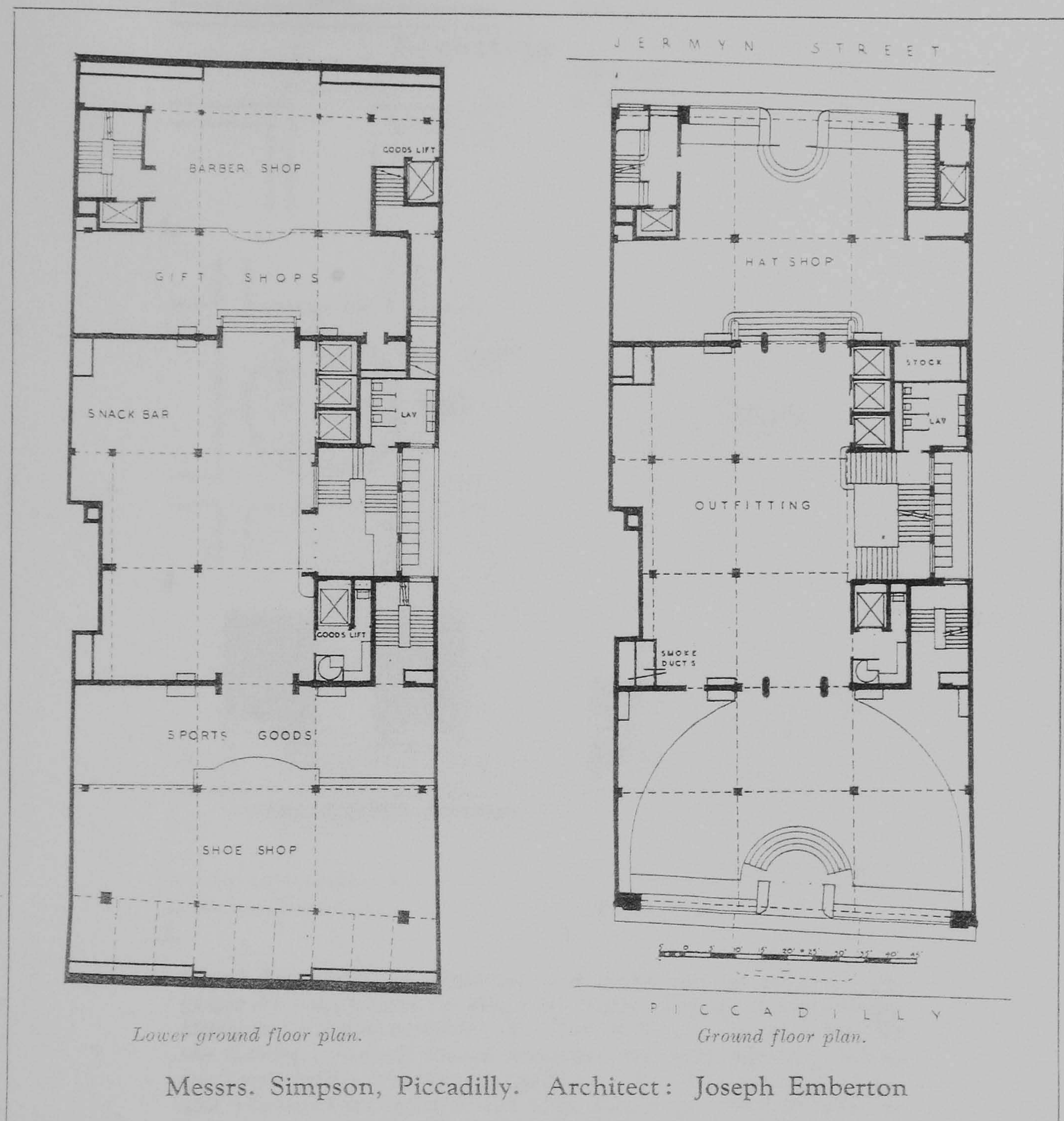
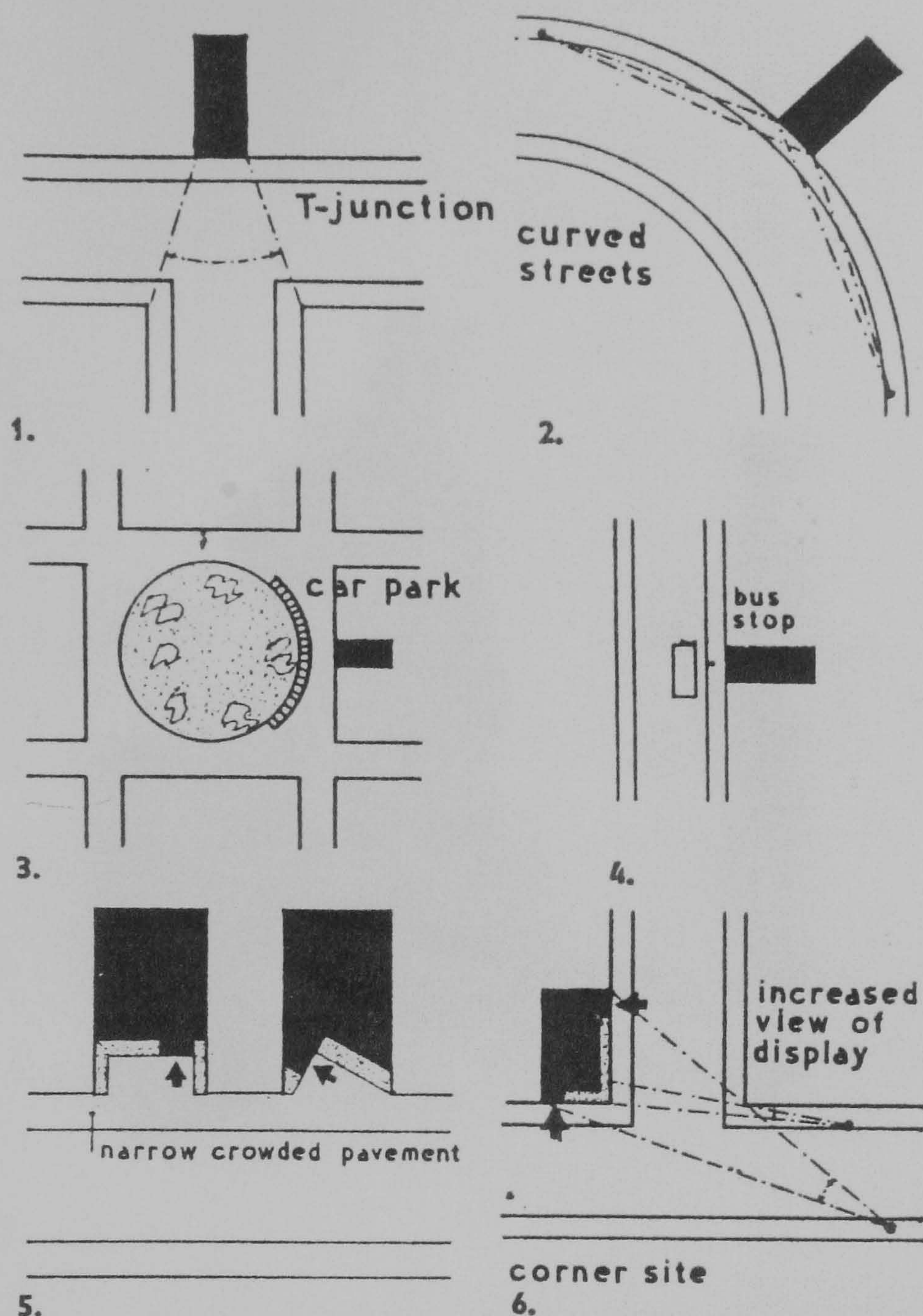


Figure 4.14 Plans of Simpsons' ground and lower ground floors, *Architect and Building News*, 8 May 1936, 158.





1 and 2 : Shops in positions like these can be seen by the passer-by long before he gets near them. Display is accordingly likely to be more valuable. 3 : Proximity to a car park may be the making of a shop whose clientele is the very wealthy, such as exclusive tailors and beauty parlours. 4 : It is not only Lyons and Woolworths but also the high-class shop which benefits by being near a bus stop if such a stop is regularly used by potential customers, cf. Simpsons, Piccadilly. 5 : Recessed windows of this kind can be attractive in themselves as well as being a practical necessity, cf. "Shanks," Bond Street. 6 : A corner site not only gives greater length of window, but that window is more valuable per foot run for a similar reason to the two first diagrams above.

Figure 4.15 Bryan and Norman Westwood, *Smaller Retail Shops*, London: The Architectural Press, 1937, 17





LIBERTY & CO. LTD., REGENT STREET, LONDON, W.1  
Telephone: REGENT 1234

Figure 4.16 Liberty and Co. Christmas catalogue, c.1939, Liberty Archive, City of Westminster Archive, 788/33/7.



## The Ground Floor...

This plan shows the arrangement of departments.

The shaded portion is occupied by the Fabric Sections.

Note how display corridors encircle the floor and enable each department to be reached without passing through another.

*Escalators and Lifts to  
all six Floors.*

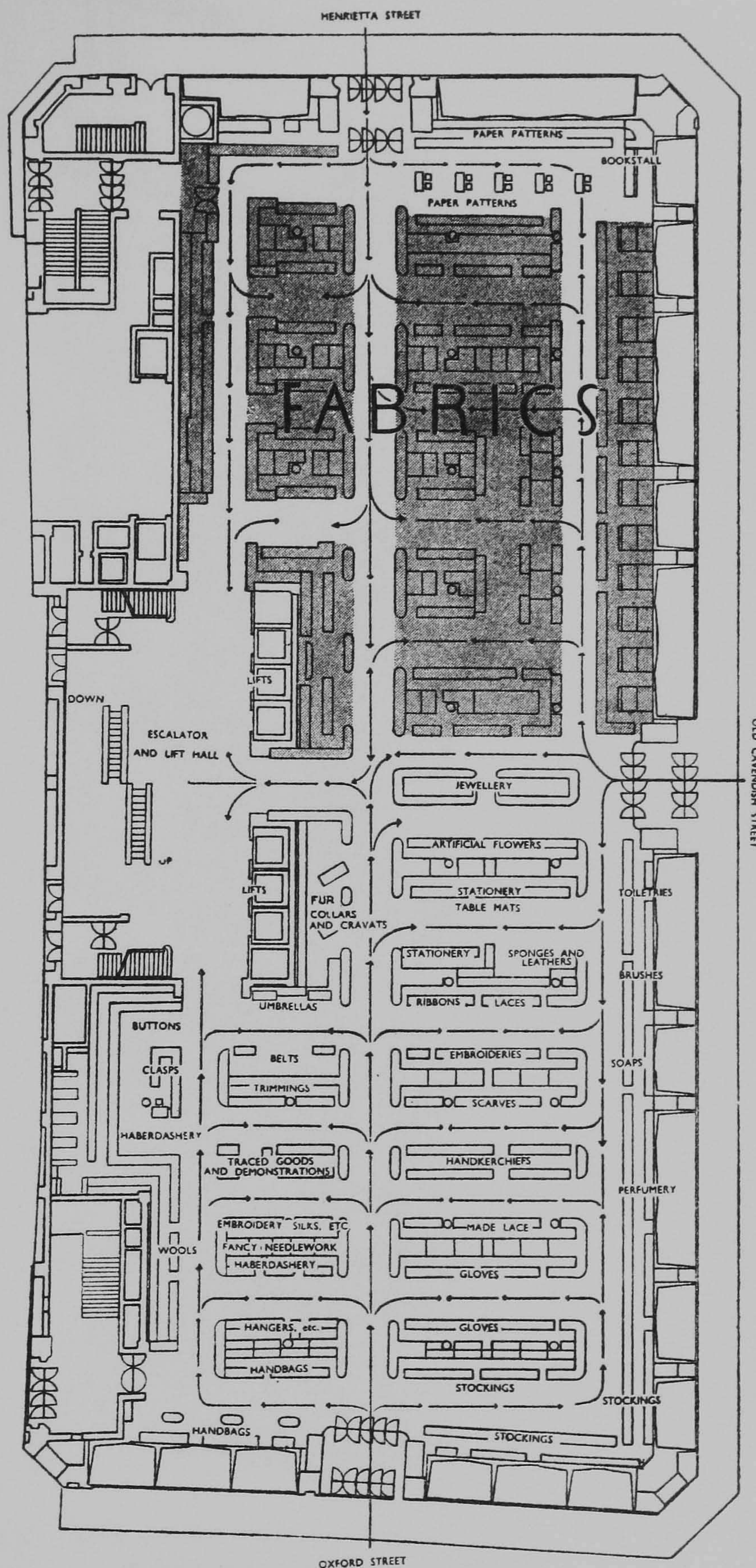


Figure 4.17 Ground floor plan, D. H. Evans brochure, 1937, House of Fraser Archive, Glasgow University Archive, HF 11/15/7.



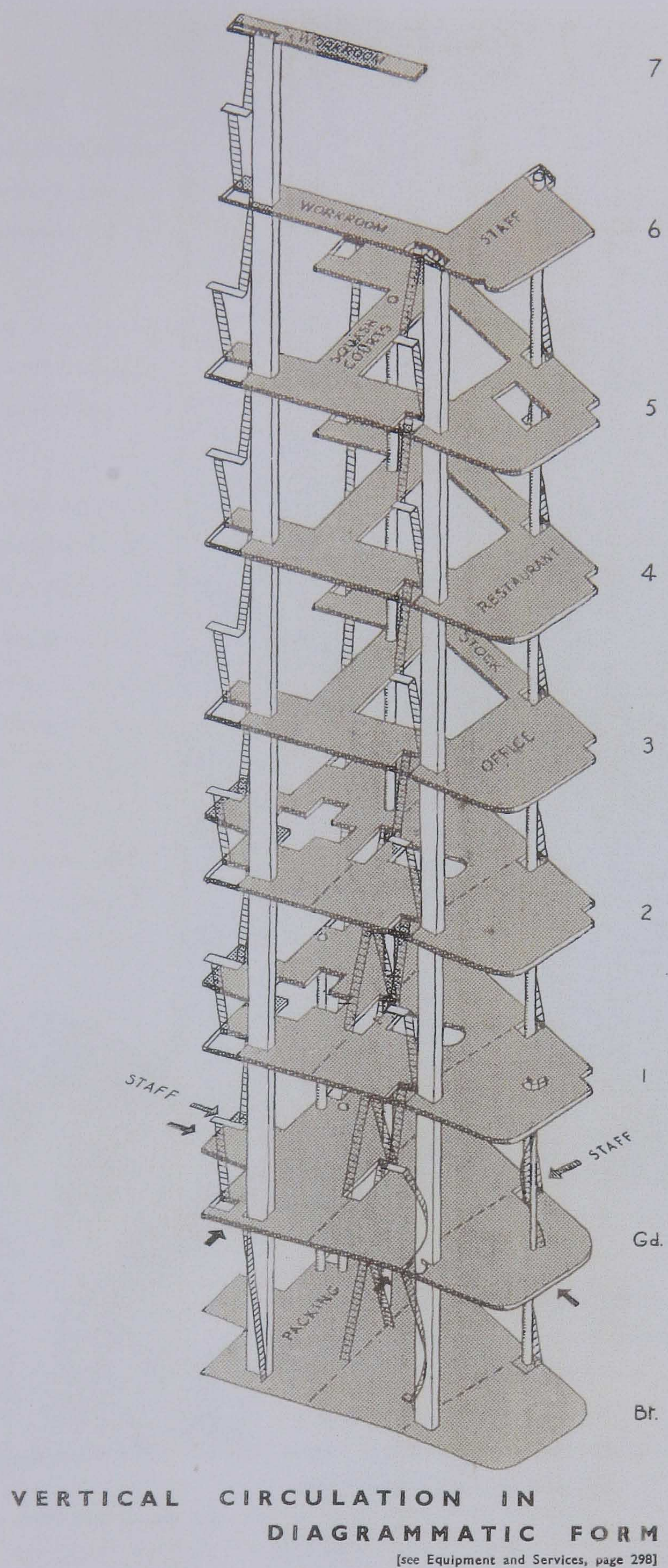


Figure 4.18 Review of Peter Jones, *Architectural Review*, June 1939, 293.



## *D. H. Evans*

*new building* has been planned with but one basic idea . . . but one object in view . . . the comfort and convenience of its customers.

The first consideration is the question of providing convenient, easy-to-find, quick methods of transport for customers from one floor to another.

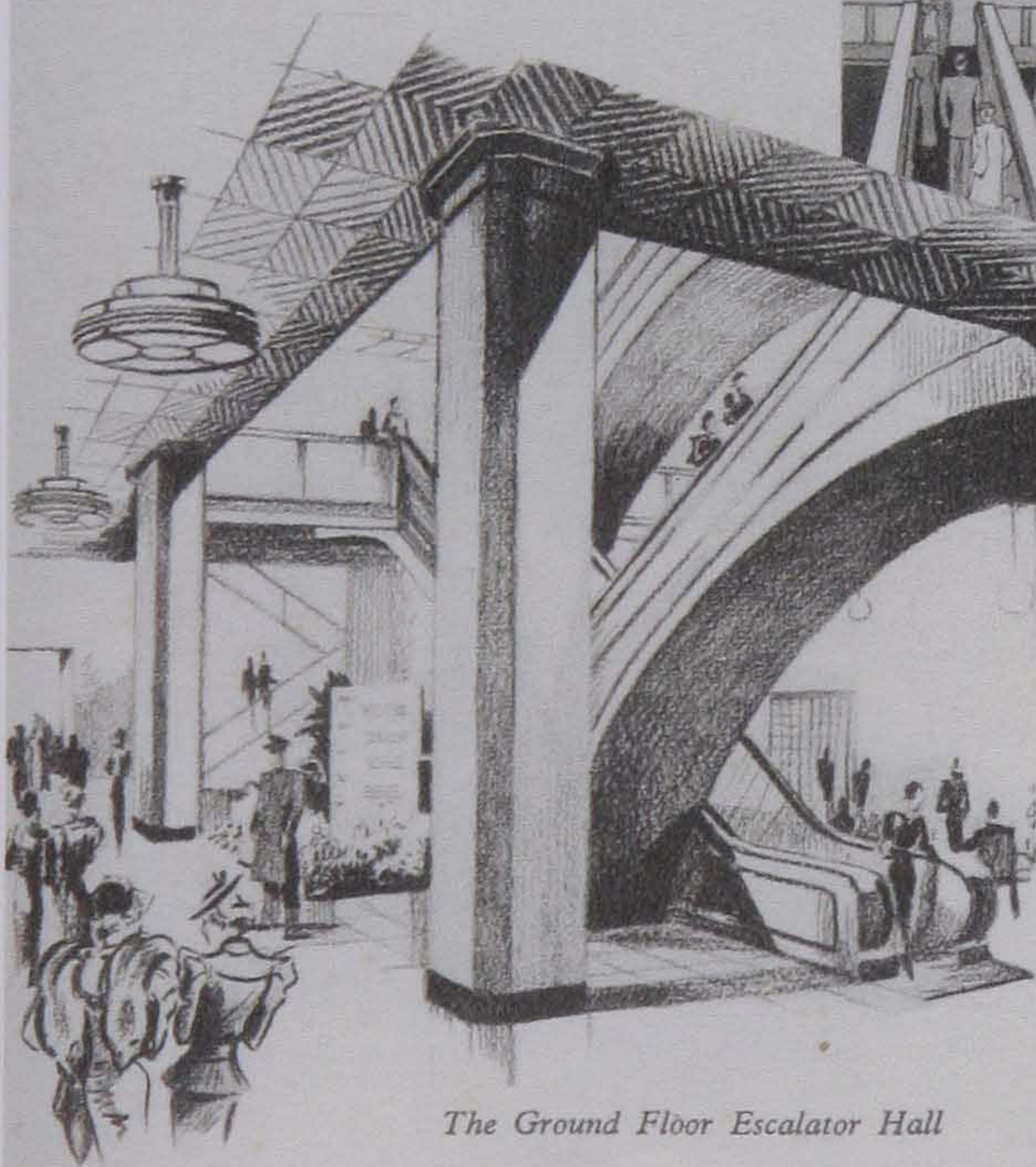
In this matter D. H. Evans have found the ideal arrangement in a central escalator and lift hall, common to all six selling floors.

This central situation has the invaluable advantage of enabling customers, knowing their exact position in the building, to see at a glance the direction of the department required.

Fixed stairs are also provided, built at that correct modern angle that reduces the effort of ascent and descent to the minimum.



*An impression of the Escalator and Lift Hall*



*The Ground Floor Escalator Hall*

As everywhere in the building, this great hall is magnificently appointed. Walls and pillars are of delicate beige-pink, Travertine marble; the floors are cork, polished to a soft, brown glow; the ceilings show a modernistic design in fibrous plaster; the sheen of metal work on the stairs, escalators and lifts is achieved in silver and copper bronze surfaces, satin finished.

page 12

Figure 4.19 Opening brochure for D. H. Evans, 1937, 12. John Lewis Partnership Archive Collection, 422/3.





*The Fabric department is liberally displayed so that customers may walk around and inspect their materials before purchasing*

Page 9

Figure 4.20 Fabric department, D. H. Evans brochure, 1937, 9. House of Fraser Archive, Glasgow University Archive, HF 11/15/7.



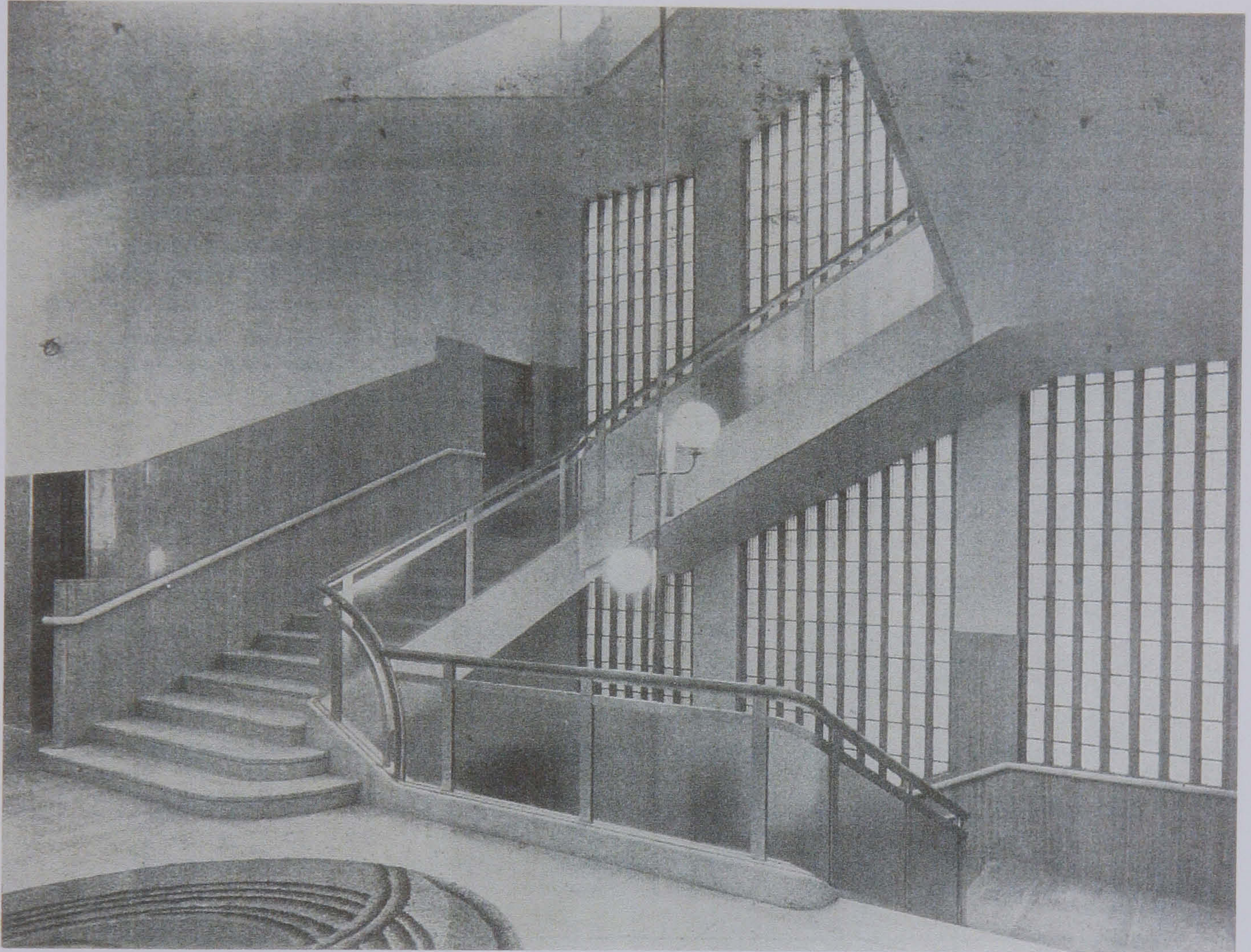
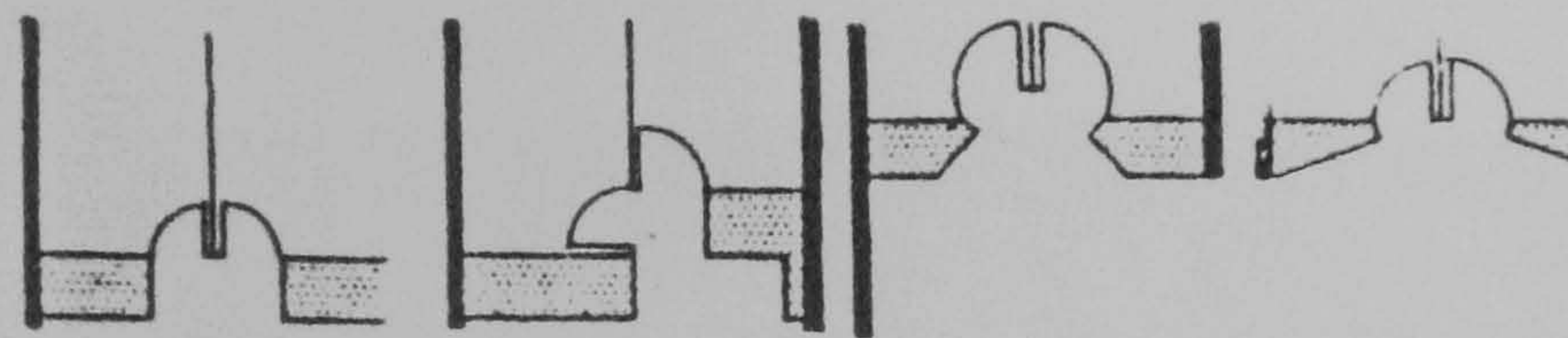
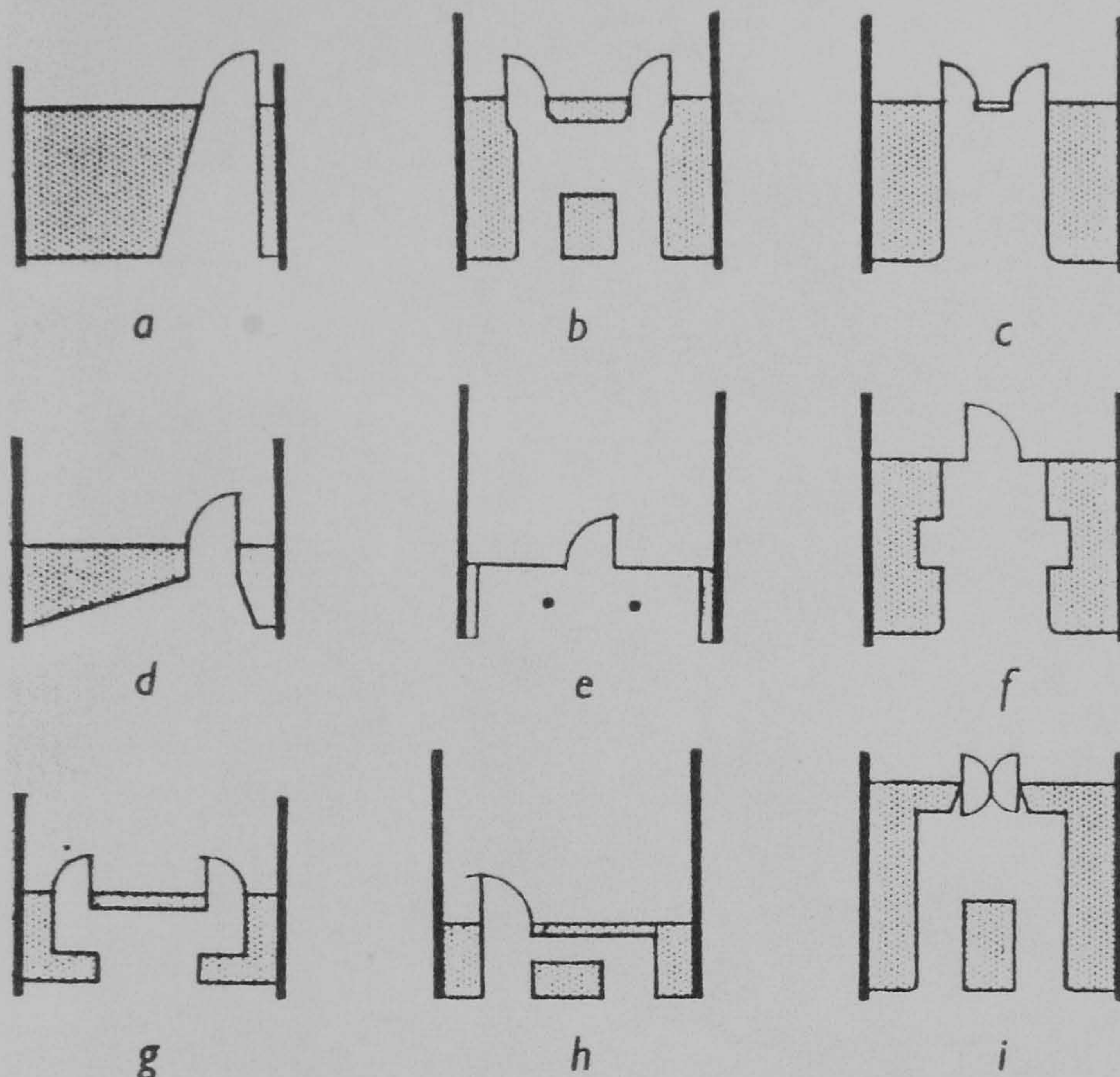


Figure 4.21 The staircase at Simpsons, *Architect and Building News*, 8 May 1936,158





Diagrams of pairs of shops showing treatment of doors and showcases.



Diagrams showing various layouts of shopfronts.

The general aim underlying the layout of shopfronts is to obtain the maximum run of show-window.

(a) Shows an arrangement suitable for a furniture shop where objects of varying sizes are displayed.

(b) Semi-arcade type with isolated showcase. If the frontage is narrow congestion occurs as customers are entering or leaving the shop.

(d) Splayed windows are more easily seen by the approaching customer.

(e) By setting the windows back from the building line a space is formed where the potential customer can stand without being jostled by the passers-by. Small showcases at right angles to the pavement are visible to the approaching customer.

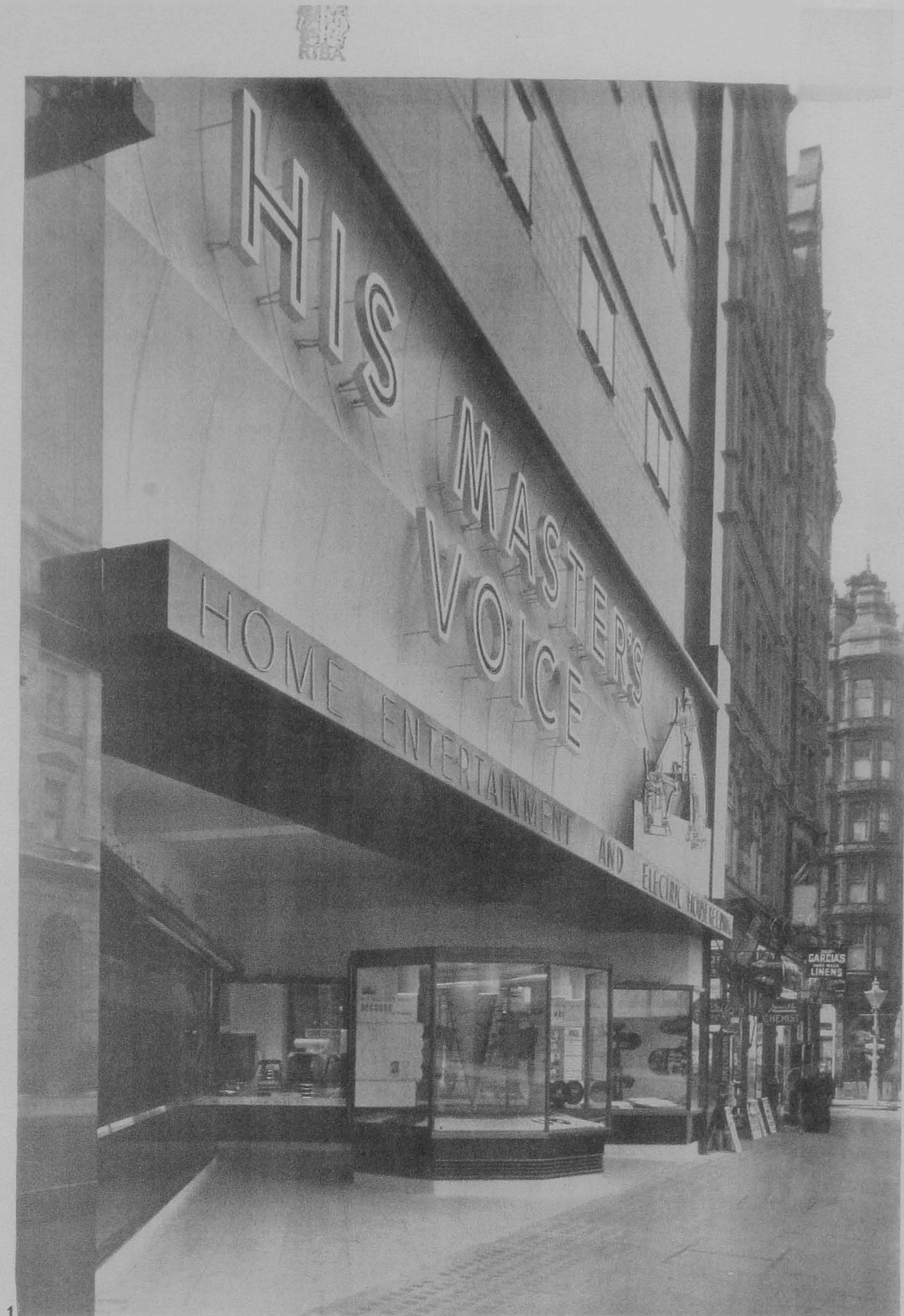
(f) Where the door is set well back it should be clearly visible from the pavement.

(g) A type frequently used for shoe shops where a great deal of display is required.

(h and i) Centre showcases must be kept low, otherwise the entrance doors will be obscured.

Figure 4.22 Bryan and Norman Westwood, *Smaller Retail Shops*, London: The Architectural Press, 1937, 23





## CURRENT ARCHITECTURE

## SHOWROOMS

JOSEPH EMBERTON

**THE SITE** is on Oxford Street, London, being that of previous showrooms for the same firm destroyed by fire in 1937. General requirements consisted of : showrooms on the lower ground floor, adequate window display and gramophone audition compartments on the ground floor, the first floor being devoted to instrument demonstration, and the second, third and fourth floors to administrative purposes.

**PLANNING** on the largely enclosed, wedge-shaped site was helped by the inclusion of a television demonstration studio in the requirements, since this could be conveniently housed over the ground floor window display, the blank wall space forming a background for the illuminated sign.

1, the façade to Oxford Street, showing the neon fascia signs.

Figure 4.23 Review of His Master's Voice, Oxford Street, *Architectural Review*, July 1937, 7.



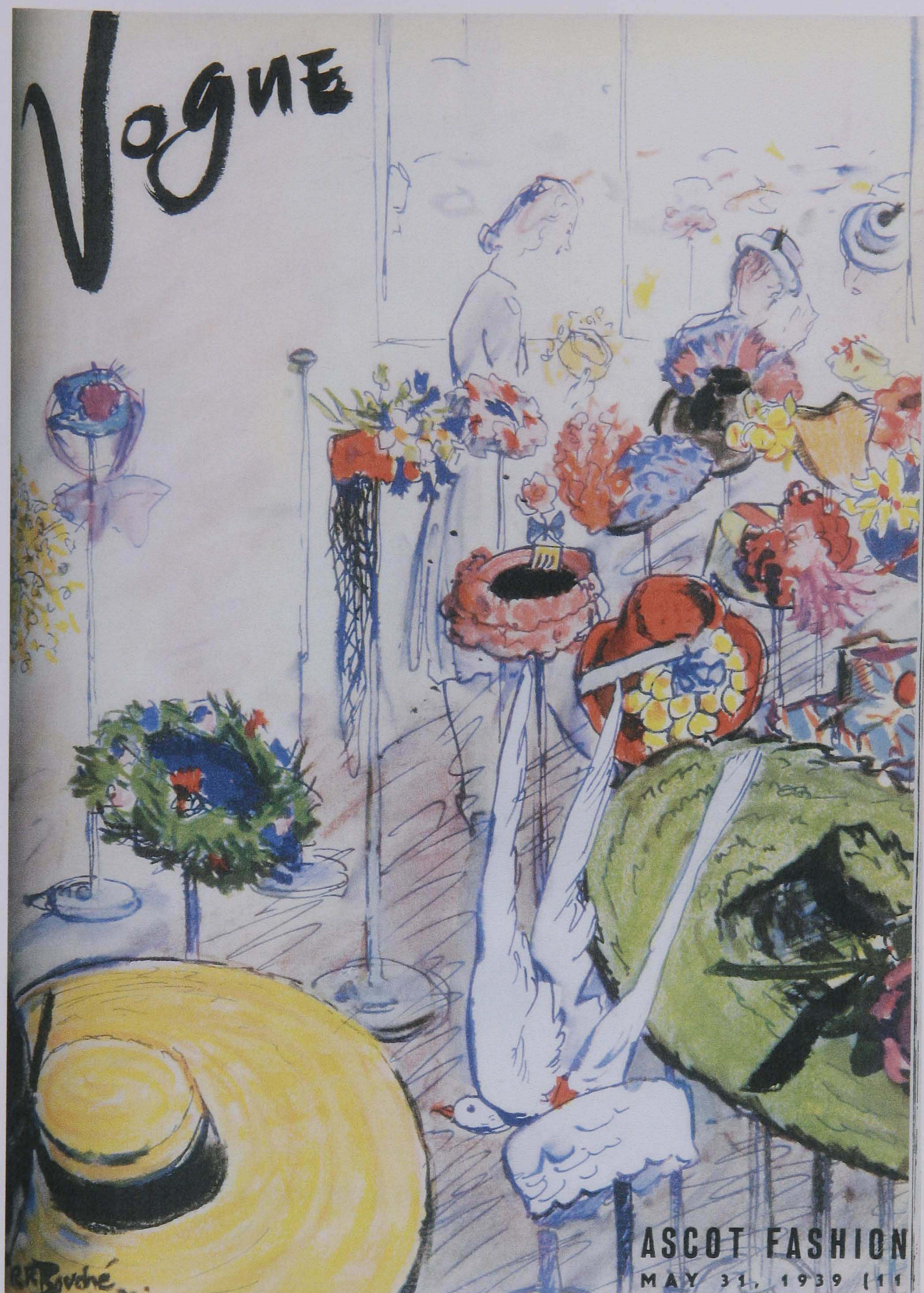


Figure 4.24 Front cover of *Vogue*, 31 May 1939.



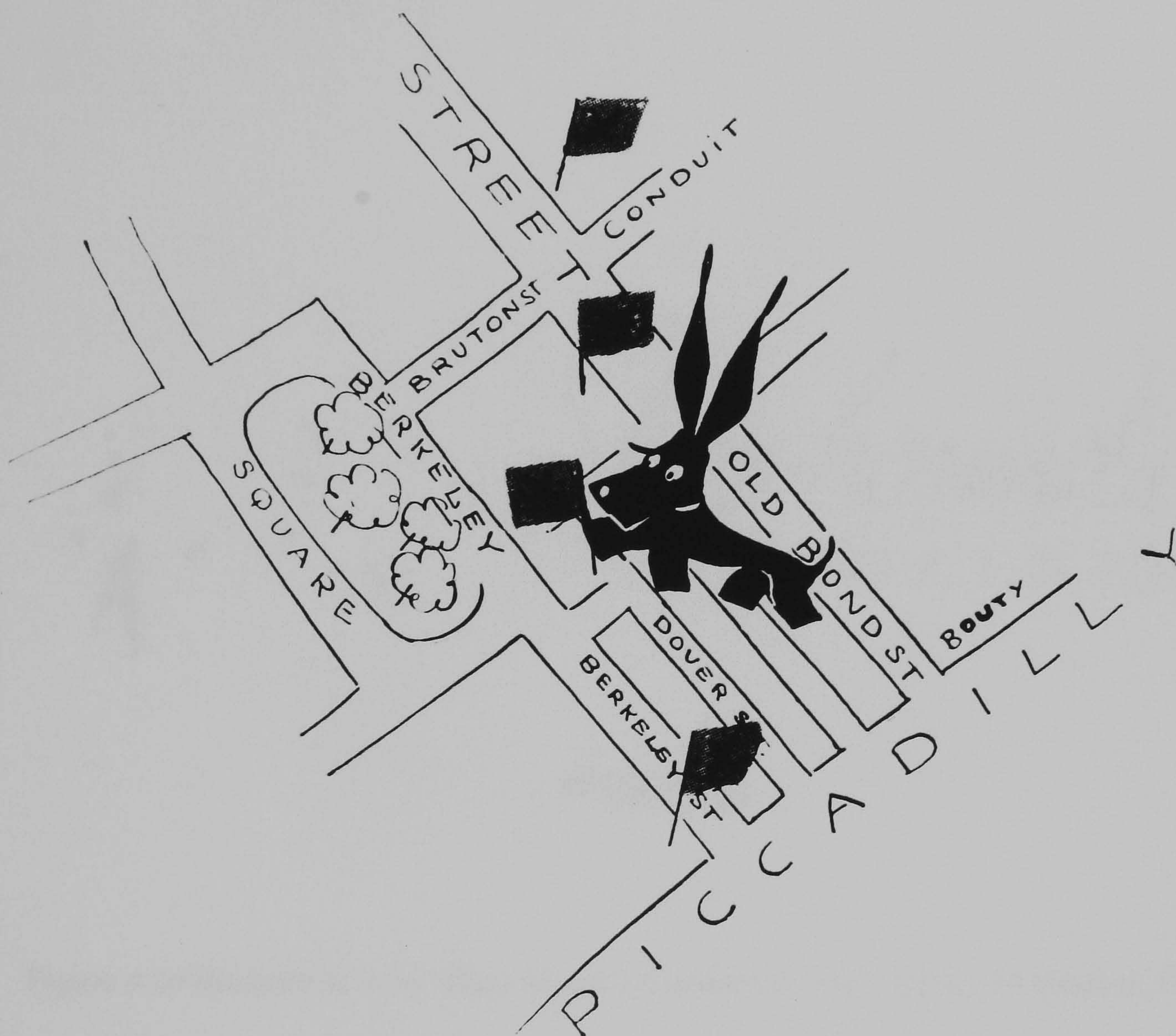


Figure 4.25 Illustration from 'Shop-hound Puts Them on the Map', *Vogue*, 20 January 1937, 62





Figure 4.26 Illustration from 'Shop-hound's Conducted Tour', *Vogue*, 14 October, 1936.



## SHOP-HOUND has a present for you

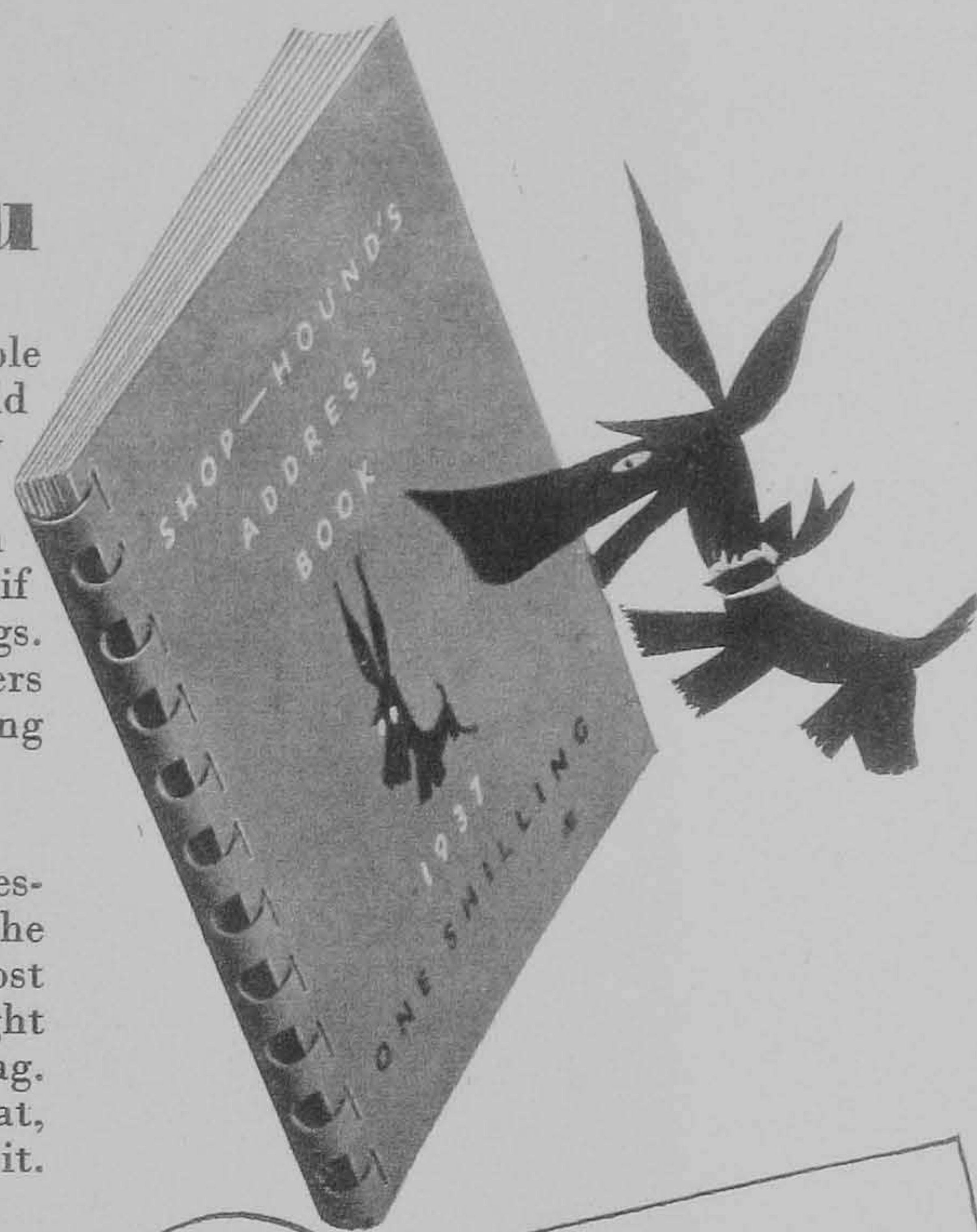
It began with her fan-mail. So many of this knowledgeable animal's readers have been writing to ask her where they could find a certain chic hat or where was that cute little beauty shop she unearthed some months ago, that she began to be worried. She loves having letters, of course. But how much quicker, and how much easier for her admirers, she thought, if they had all the information they wanted right in their handbags. And so she wrote Shop-hound's Address Book and now offers it to all her regular readers as a memento of the paw-wearying journeys she makes on their behalf.

THIS little book lists by alphabetical classifications ("Accessories," "Bags," "Beauty," "Cleaning," "Corsets," etc.) all the shops and services which Vogue thinks you will find most helpful, and all the special lines in the big stores that you might not remember. It is just the right size for your handbag. And a patent binding enables it to open in a moment, stay flat, and not injure the lining of your bag or anything you keep in it.

HOWEVER, the supply is limited, so we can only give Shop-hound's Address Book to regular readers. If you are already a postal subscriber, you will get a copy anyway. If you buy from a newsagent, however, you will have to fill in the order form marked "A" at the right of this page and send it to Vogue. Even if you already have a standing order with your newsagent, send the form as a check. Otherwise the Address Book cannot be sent to you.

WE are only asking you to have Vogue delivered till the beginning of August, as you will probably be going away by then. We leave it to you whether you extend your order or make new arrangements for subsequent issues wherever you may be.

HOWEVER, some of Shop-hound's readers, we have learned, spend a lot of time travelling. Or they go away early. Or for some other reason they cannot fulfil the conditions for the gift. And so Vogue will sell Shop-hound's Address Book to these readers, for one shilling plus postage, if they send the order marked "B". But these readers must please hurry, too, to be in time.



ORDER FORM "A"  
To Vogue, 112 Fetter Lane, London, E.C.4.  
Please send me a free copy of Shop-hound's Address Book  
and instruct my newsagent:

Mr. \_\_\_\_\_  
of \_\_\_\_\_  
(Fill in the name and address of your newsagent here)  
to deliver to me 8 issues of Vogue, from the April 28th to the  
Aug. 4th issue inclusive. I agree that this order is non-cancellable.  
My name is \_\_\_\_\_  
My address is \_\_\_\_\_

ORDER FORM "B"  
To Vogue, 112 Fetter Lane, London, E.C.4.  
Please send me a copy of Shop-hound's Address Book for which  
I enclose 1/-, plus 2d. for posting costs.  
My name is \_\_\_\_\_  
My address is \_\_\_\_\_



Here are the issues of Vogue that we ask you to authorise us to instruct your newsagent to deliver, so that we may send you Shop-hound's Address Book free:—

April 28	Coronation Number	2/-
May 11	Gala Season Number	1/-
May 26	DOUBLE NUMBER. Vogue Ascot Fashions issue & Vogue Pattern Book	2/-
June 9	Summer Fashions & Festivities Number	1/-
June 23	Summer Travel Number	1/-
July 7	Holiday Fashions & Sports Number	1/-
July 21	DOUBLE NUMBER. Clothes for the North issue of Vogue & Vogue Pattern Book	2/-
August 4	London Summer Number	1/-

Figure 4.27 *Vogue* Address Book advertised in *Vogue*, 14 April 1937, 64.





Figure 4.28 Advertisement for London Tramways, 1928, London Metropolitan Archives.





Figure 4.29 Advertisement for Jaeger, *Art and Industry*, August 1937, 49.



At last

# DAKS

for women

No more need to envy men their Daks! Simpson Piccadilly have launched Daks for women, with the same beautiful fit, perfect hang, shirt control and comfort-in-action cut as men's. The only difference—a single side zip—the neatest fastening ever invented for women's trousers. In most of the forty-two Daks colours and materials, all sizes

30/-

## AND DAKS SUITS, TOO

Perfect for your week end cottage Daks, and man-tailored jacket, with half-belt and pleated patch pockets, 4½ gns. In grey flannel only. Other colours to order. Striped Beach Shirt 10/-. Sandals 21/-.



Women's fashions fourth floor

Simpson, 202 Piccadilly, W. 1 (Regent 2002)

Figure 4.30 Daks Advertisement in *Vogue*, 13 April 1938.



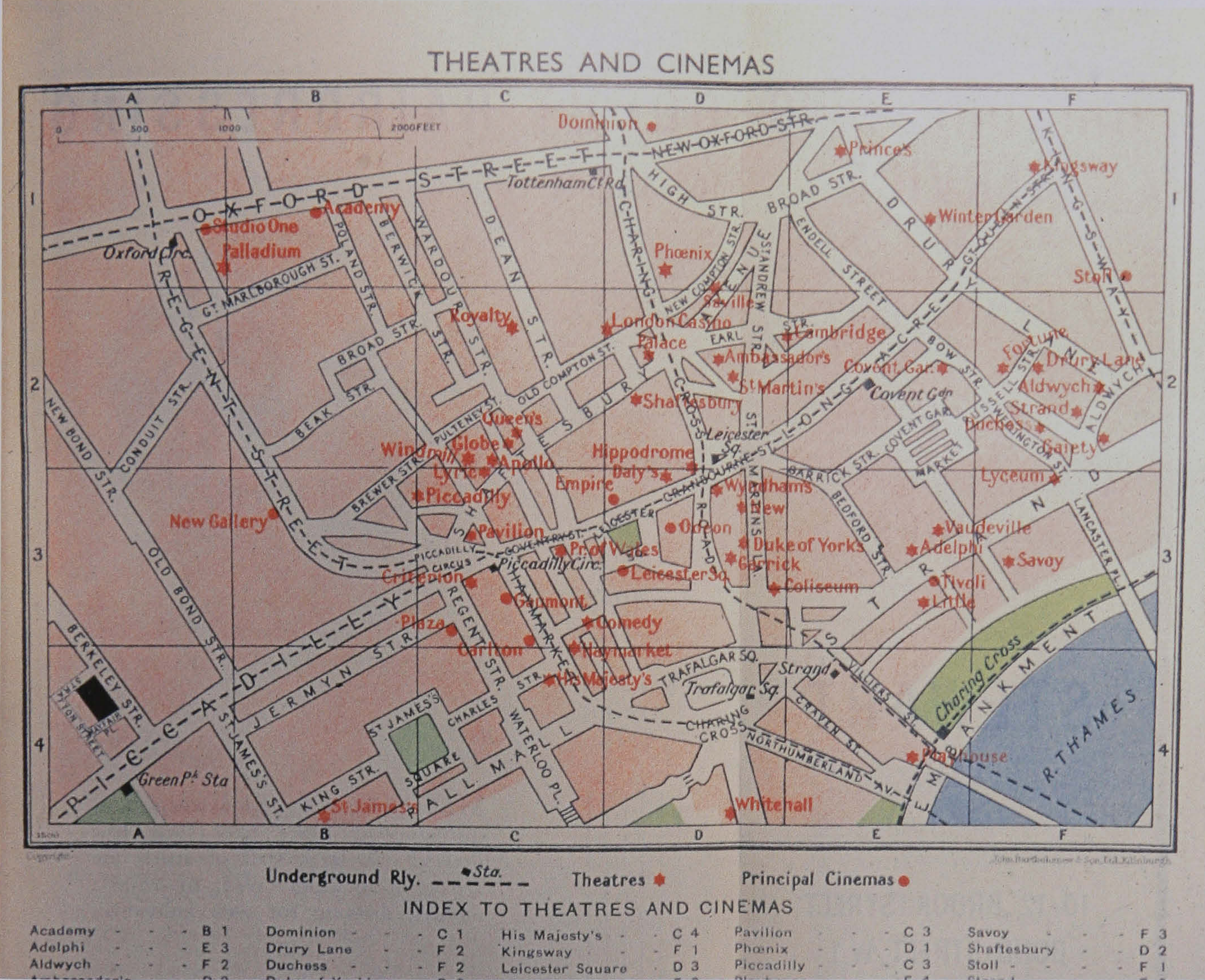


Figure 4.31 *London: A Combined Guidebook and Atlas*, London: Thomas Cook and Son, 1937.



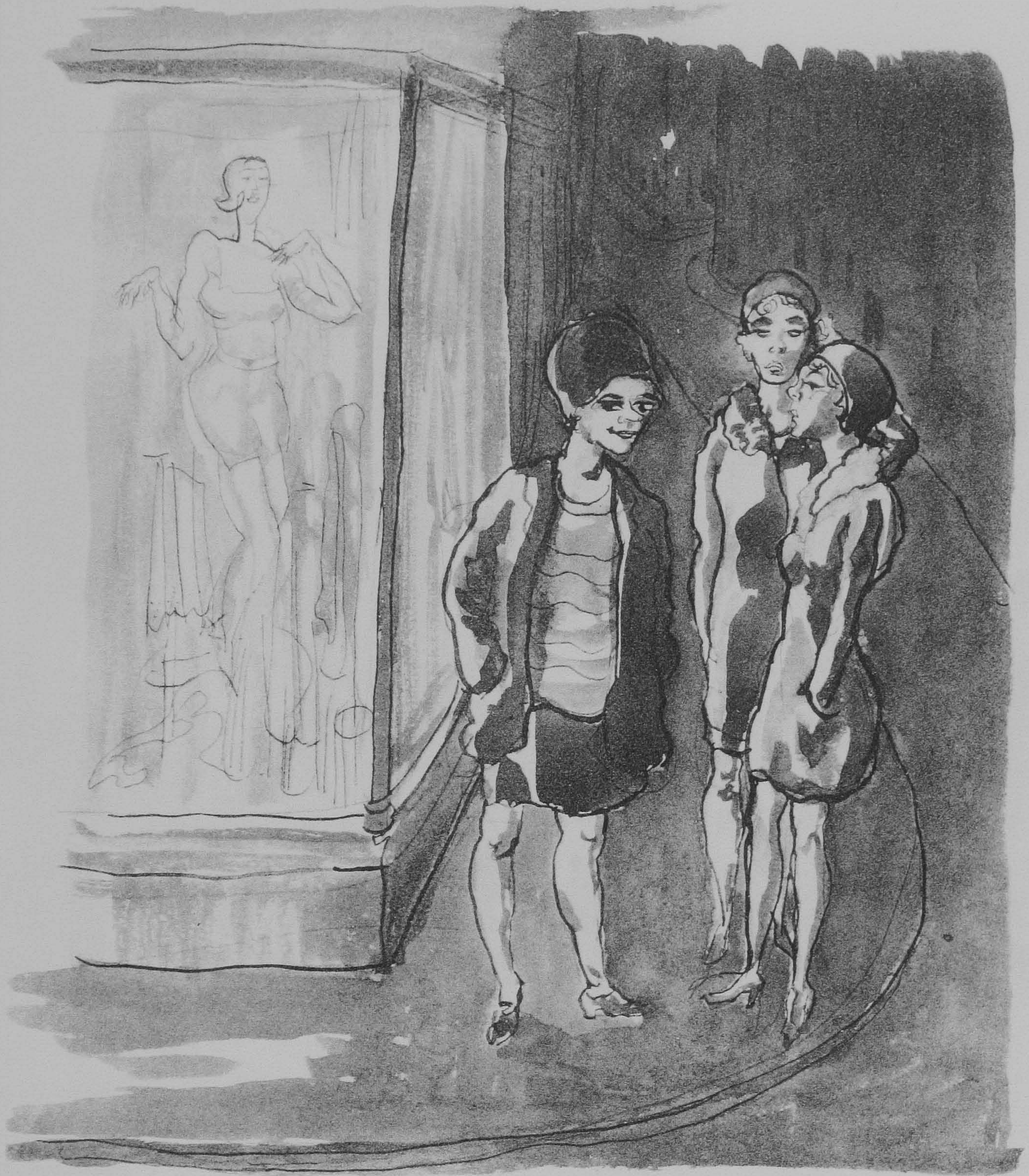


Figure 4.32 William Gaunt, *London Promenade*, London: The Studio, 1930, 20.



The LATEST STYLE for  
SPRING — with the  
Homburg effect!

Here it is in a grand line in Full Hair finished  
with a wide band in the Homburg style.  
Narrow Band Trimmed in Lace  
Great Trimmed Bands, Bird Galls,  
Lace Bands, Owl Bands or Ribbon.  
Style No. 14 and 15.

Box and Price 50c

12/9

The Newest  
HATS — can  
always be found at

**BARKERS**

in the Model Millinery Dept. on the First Floor!

Have you had your copy of our  
new Model Hat Booklet? . . .

It contains photographs of a  
fine of the new and charming  
styles. Send us your name  
and address and we'll  
post one to you at once.

**THE BRETON  
SAILOR** is given shown in  
Paris and is a very becoming  
The trimming of flowers and the trim  
is made with a . . . . .  
Lace Bands, Bird Galls, Owl Bands or Ribbon.  
Style No. 16 and 17.

Box and Price 50c

PH 12 6/11

**THIS  
BECOMING  
HAT** is given shown in  
Paris and is a very becoming  
The trimming of flowers and the trim  
is made with a . . . . .  
Lace Bands, Bird Galls, Owl Bands or Ribbon.  
Style No. 18 and 19.

Box and Price 50c

PH 12 12/9

**A SUIT HAT** is given shown in the new  
Paris and is a very becoming  
The trimming of flowers and the trim  
is made with a . . . . .  
Lace Bands, Bird Galls, Owl Bands or Ribbon.  
Style No. 20 and 21.

Box and Price 50c

PH 12 6/11

A very attractive example  
of the NEW

**FLAT SAILOR**

In Paris, Flat is a new and  
very becoming style. The  
trimming of flowers and the trim  
is made with a . . . . .  
Lace Bands, Bird Galls, Owl Bands or Ribbon.  
Style No. 22 and 23.

Box and Price 50c

PH 12 12/9

**GREAT WHITE SALE**  
CIVIL SERVICE STORES

Figure 4.33 Front page, *Daily Mail*, 27 April 1936.



# DRAGES

## LIVING ADVERTISEMENTS

JANE acts as guide to Mr. & Mrs. Everyman at the  
**GREAT SPRING**

### *Festival* OF **HAPPY ENGLISH HOMES**

JANE: Here we are, then, you two young things.  
I'm the Guide! What would you like to see?

MRS. EVERYMAN: *Everything!*

JANE: All right. Let's start with the bedrooms.  
What about this?

MRS. EVERYMAN: Don't lead us into extrava-  
gance, Jane.

JANE: This complete group, my dear, would  
be delivered to your home on payment of 9/6.



**SHIRLEY GROUP.** This soundly made Bedroom Group com-  
prises a 3 ft. 6 in. Wardrobe with mirror inside door and drawer under.  
A Dressing-Table of the rank-centre style, fitted with a large frameless  
cheval mirror. A Dressing Chest fitted with four drawers, and a  
Bedstead in a 4 ft. or 4 ft. 6 in. size, fitted with iron sides. There are  
two cane-seated Chairs. (Bedding not included.) Complete Group 22 Gns.

Delivered on payment of

**9/6** and 9/6  
monthly

MR. EVERYMAN: And we would have  
over four years in which to com-  
plete the payment?

JANE: You would. *That's Drages  
Famous 50 Pay-Way.* But there are  
much bigger surprises than that in  
store for you! There are hundreds  
of bargains like this!



Figure 4.34 Advertisement for Drages, *Daily Mail*, 4 May 1936, 15.



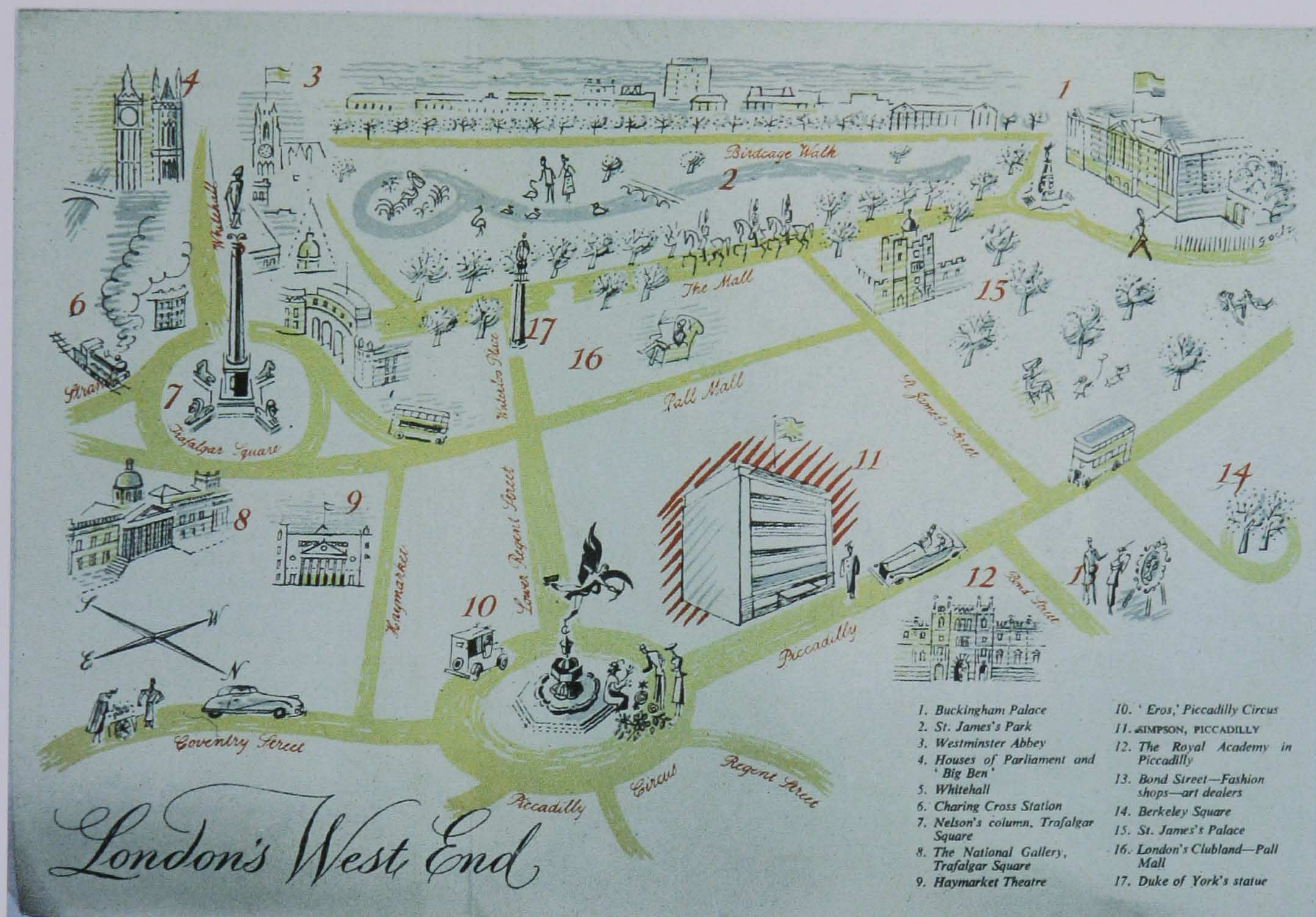
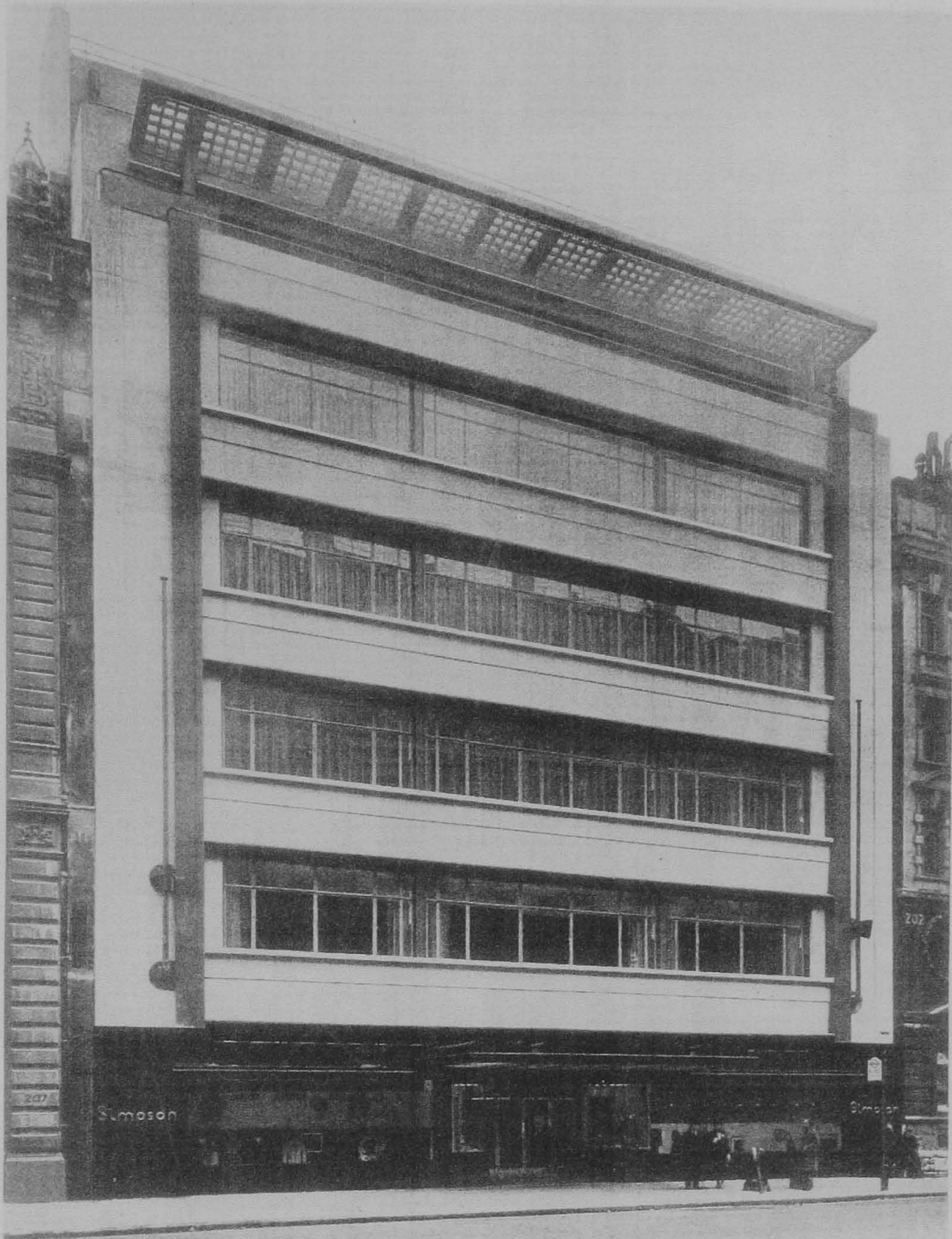


Figure 4.35 Publicity leaflet, c.1950s, Simpsons Archive.





*The façade to Piccadilly. The use of Portland stone was a condition imposed by the landlords.*

MESSRS. SIMPSON, PICCADILLY

Architect : Joseph Emberton, F.R.I.B.A.

Figure 5.1 *Architect and Building News*, 8 May 1926, 155.





## PETER JONES STORE, SLOANE SQUARE

When the first wing of Peter Jones was opened its importance as a mature contribution to modern architecture, was recognized. But as the building was only the first unit of a

WILLIAM CRABTREE; SLATER AND MOBERLY;  
PROF. C. H. REILLY, ASSOCIATED ARCHITECTS

Figure 5.2 *Architectural Review*, June 1939, 291.



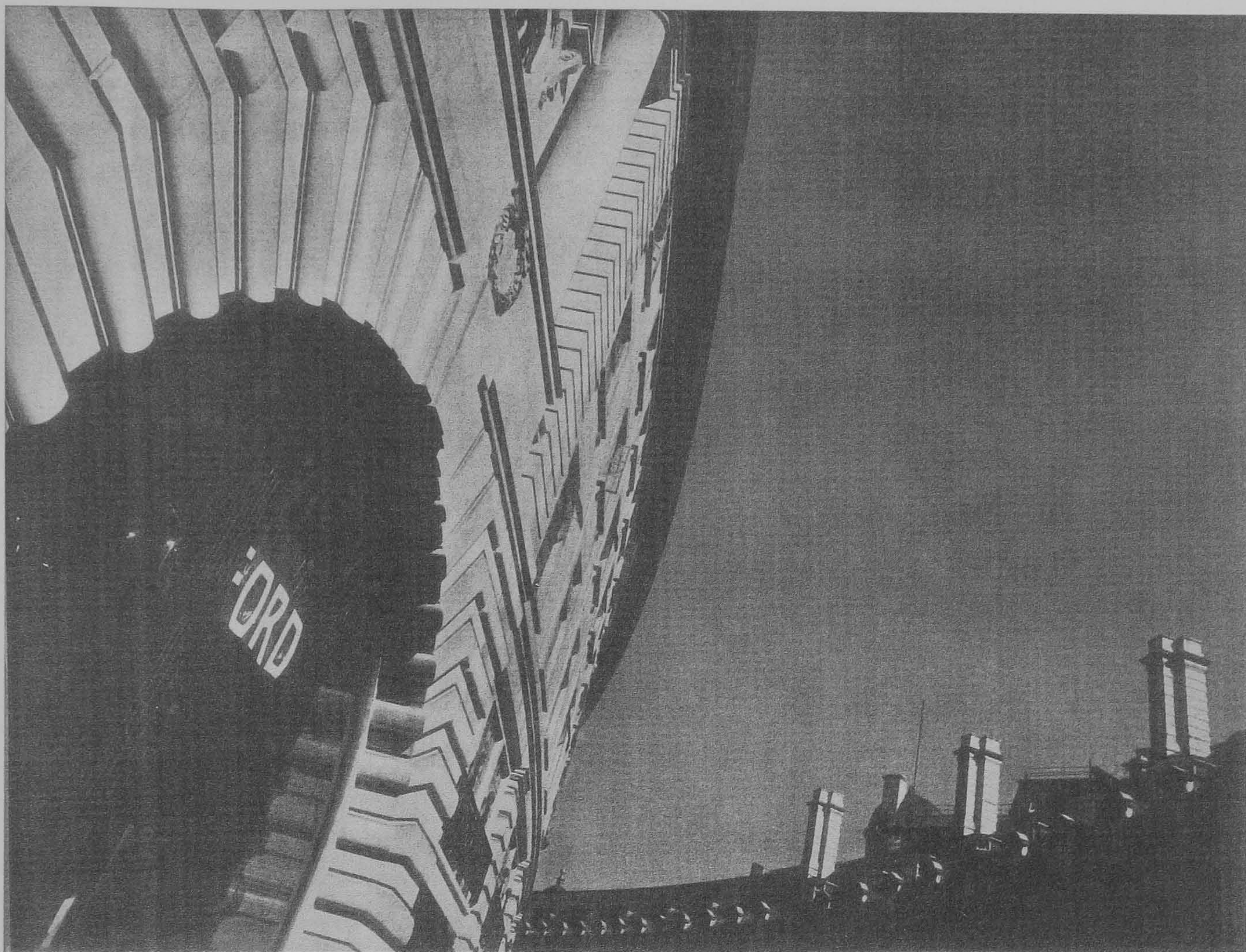


Plate I. June 1930.  
A WORM'S-EYE VIEW OF THE  
QUADRANT, REGENT STREET,  
LONDON.

From the photograph by  
M. O. DELL and H. L. WAINWRIGHT,  
official photographers to  
THE ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW.

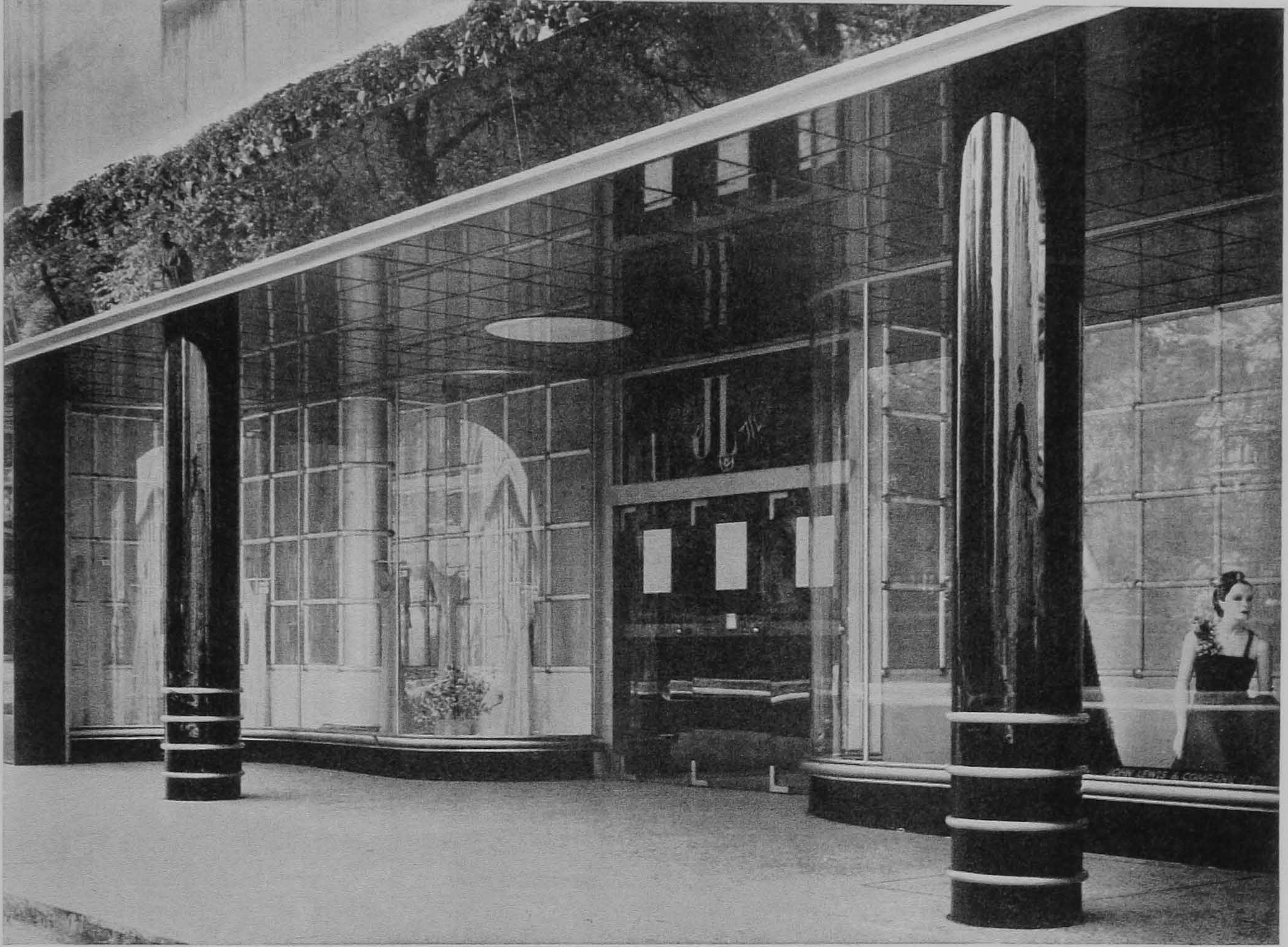
Figure 5.3 *Architectural Review*, June 1930, Plate I.





Figure 6.1 The rebuilding of Liberty's, Oxford Street, 1924. National Monuments Record.





NEW PREMISES FOR MESSRS. JOHN LEWIS & CO., LTD., CAVENDISH SQ., W. DETAIL OF SHOP FRONT.

ASSOCIATED ARCHITECTS: MESSRS. SLATER, MOBERLEY & UREN, FF.R.I.B.A.,  
WILLIAM CRABTREE, A.R.I.B.A., AND RENE COULON OF PARIS.

*The chief decorative materials of the columns, fascia and plinth are black glass and gilded metal. The entire soffit of the colonnade and of the display windows is composed of black glass and black metal. The sashes are of gilded metal and the enclosures of the display windows are faced with gold plated glass and white rubber. The doors and two entrances are gilded metal with panels of transparent mirror. Craftsmen: Messrs. George Parnall and Co., Ltd.*

Figure 6.2, *Architecture Illustrated*, July 1939, 22.



## *The New Building*



First Section of Messrs. D. H. Evans & Co. Ltd.'s New Building from Henrietta Street and Cavendish Street corner.

Figure 6.3 Illustration from opening brochure, 1937, John Lewis Partnership Archive Collection, 422/3.





Figure 6.4 Oxford Street, 1948, National Monuments Record.





Figure 6.5 The Pantheon, c.1937, National Monuments Record.





General View. Mr. Maufe carries on the excellent design of Smith and Brewer on the Tottenham Court Road Frontage, but introduces a new character for the frontage to Alfred Mews. The large "Lenserete" window to the new staircase will be noted as well as the extension of the colonnade with its great non-reflecting window.

Figure 6.6 'Extensions to Messrs. Heal and Son's Store Tottenham Court Road, W1',  
*Design and Construction*, November 1937, 497.





*The principal front in Kensington High Street.*

Figure 6.7 Derry and Toms, Kensington, *Architect and Building News*,  
14 April 1933, 39.



SCHEME FOR 1,400 LOW-RENTED FLATS AT SHEPHERDS BUSH, LONDON

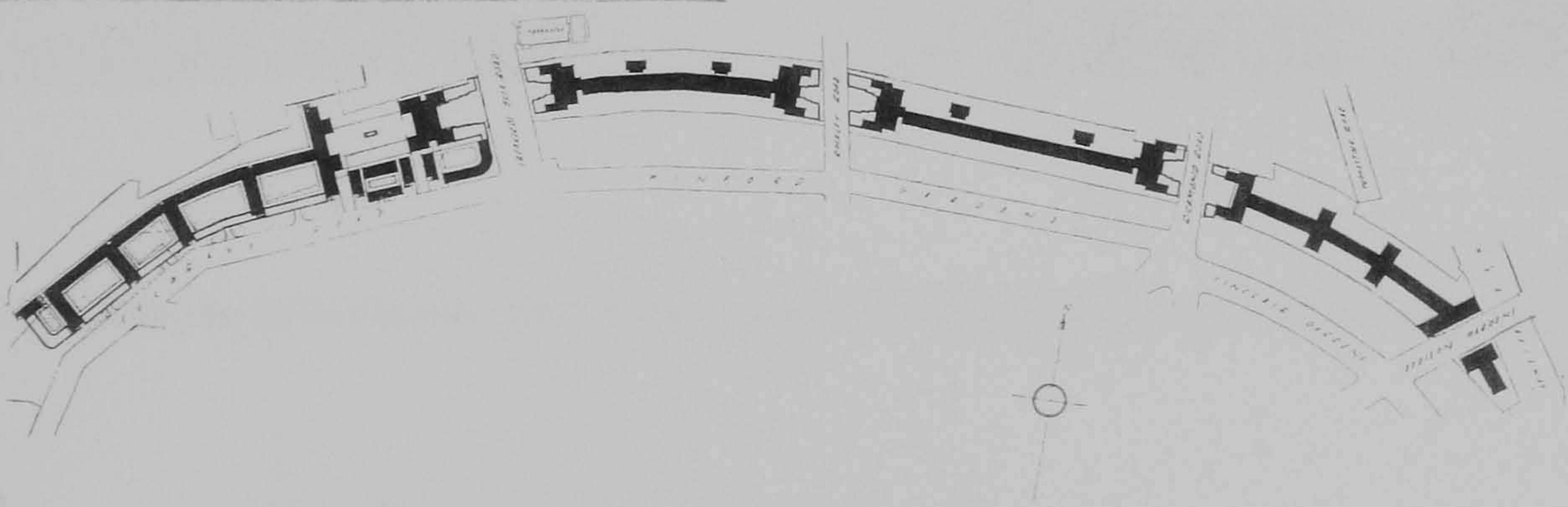
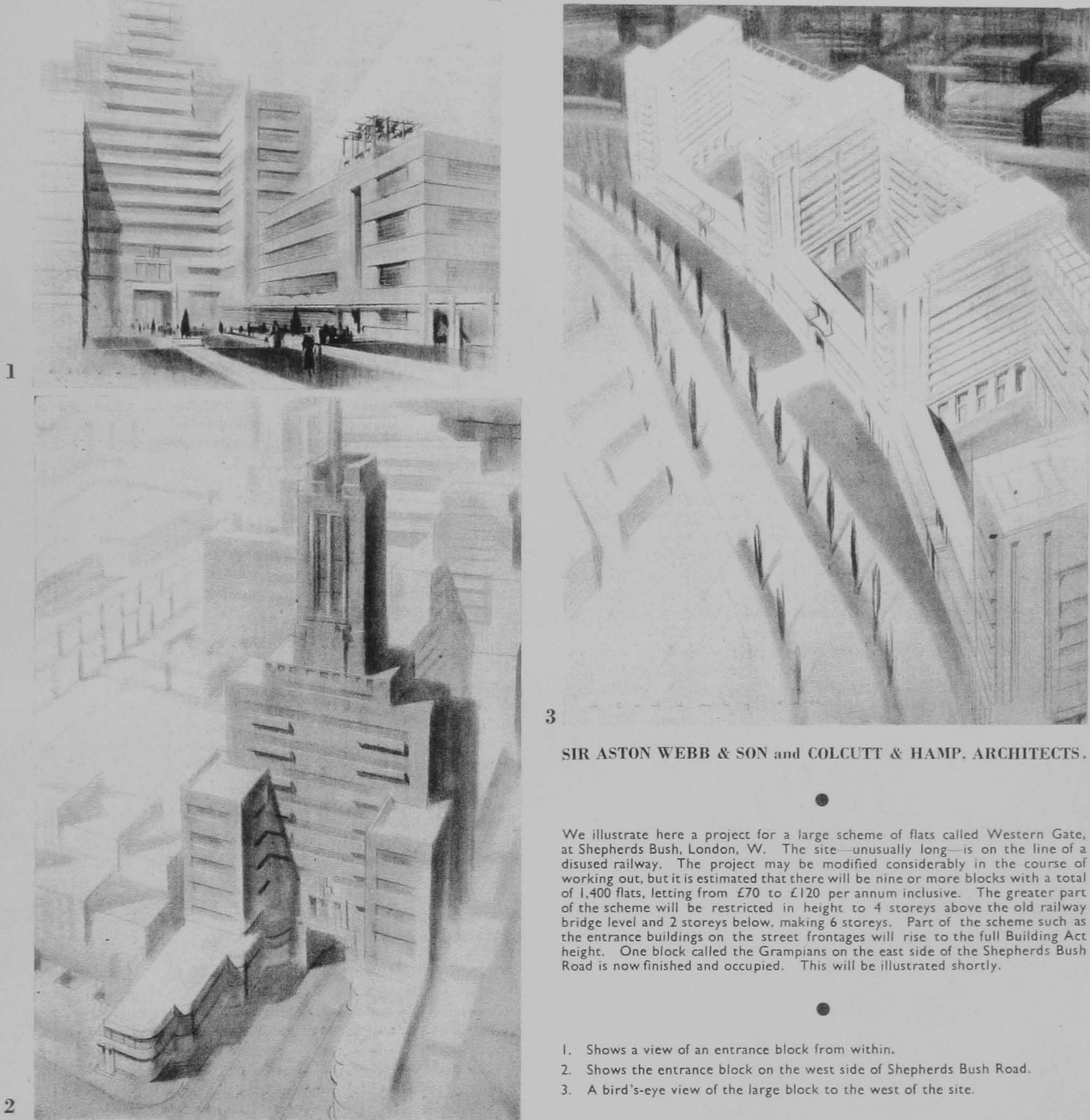


Figure 6.8 *Design and Construction*, May 1937, 258



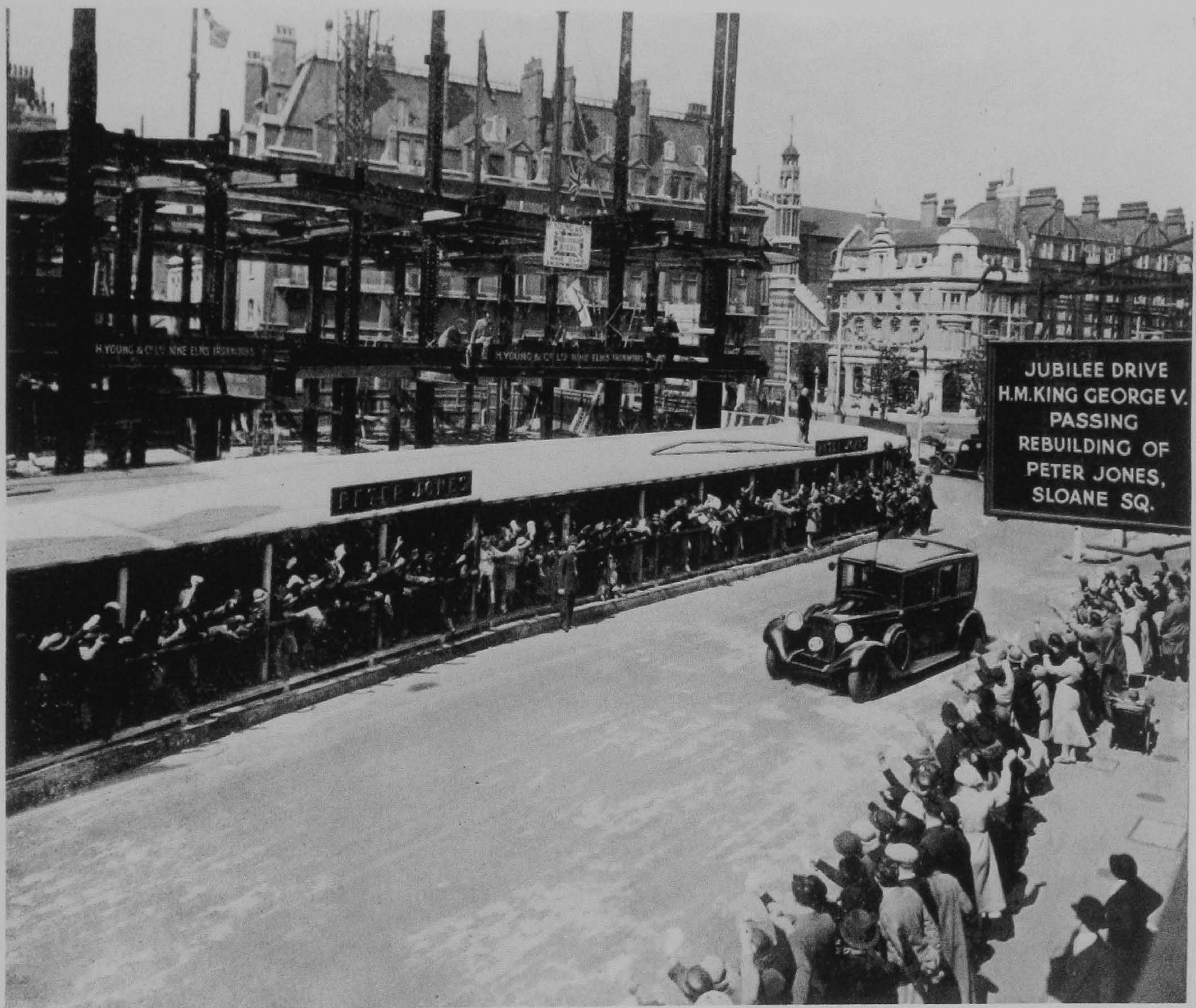


Figure 6.9 Jubilee procession, past Peter Jones, 1935, John Lewis Partnership Archive.





Figure 6.10 Building in progress at Simpsons, Felix Samuely and Partners, Reproduced in Ind, *Emberton*, Plate 73.





Figure 6.11 The Piccadilly elevation of the Geological Museum c.1910, National Monuments Record.



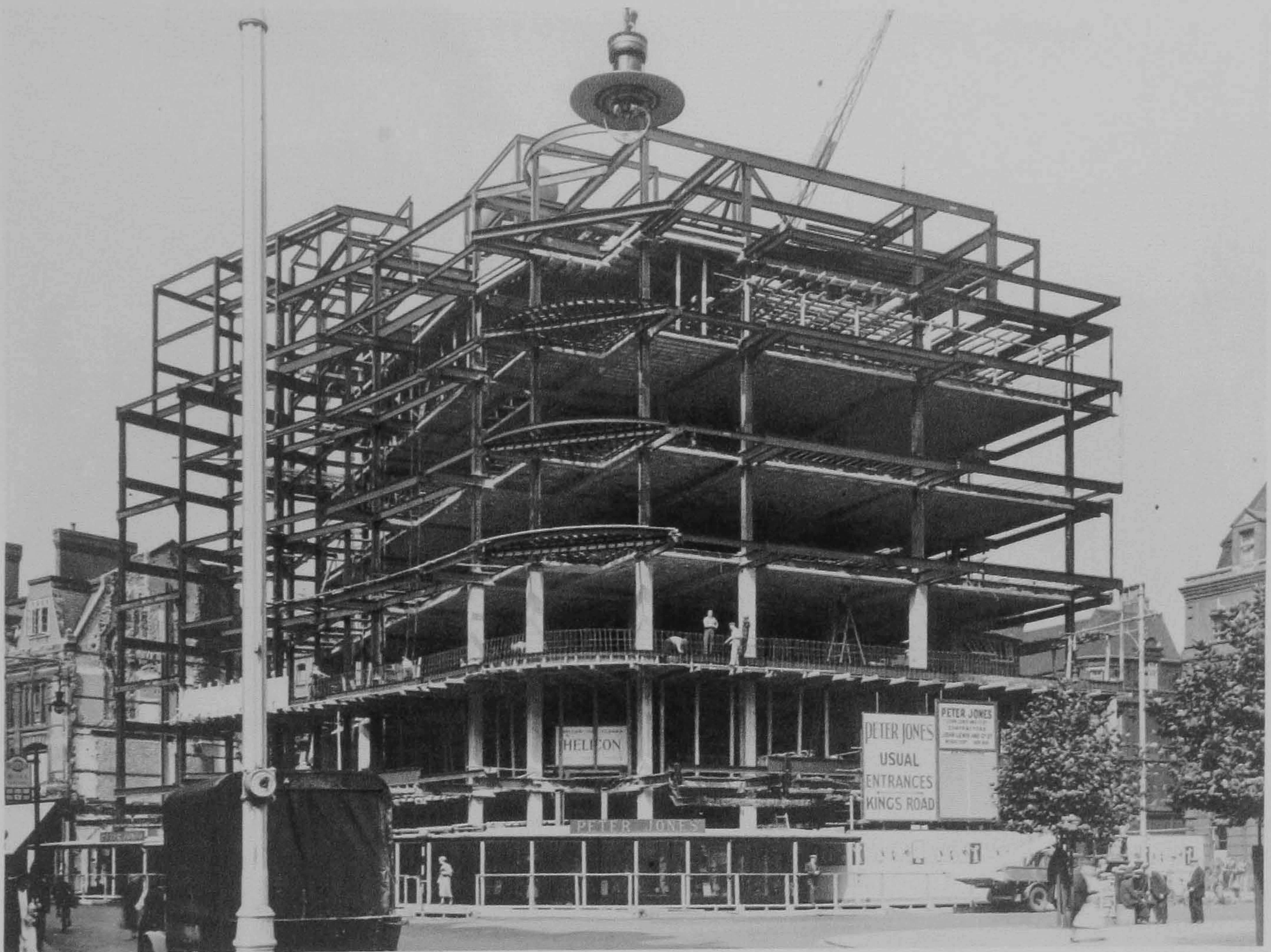


Figure 6.12 Building work at Peter Jones, 1935, John Lewis Partnership Archive.

Figure 6.13 Peter Jones





Figure 6.13 Piccadilly, c.1930s, Simpsons Archive.





New Army & Navy Stores, Victoria-street, Westminster, S.W.: Effect of Pavement Lighting.  
SIR ASTON WEBB, P.P.R.A., & SON, Architects.

Figure 6.14 *The Builder*, 8 January 1926.



"ONE OF THE SIGHTS OF LONDON"



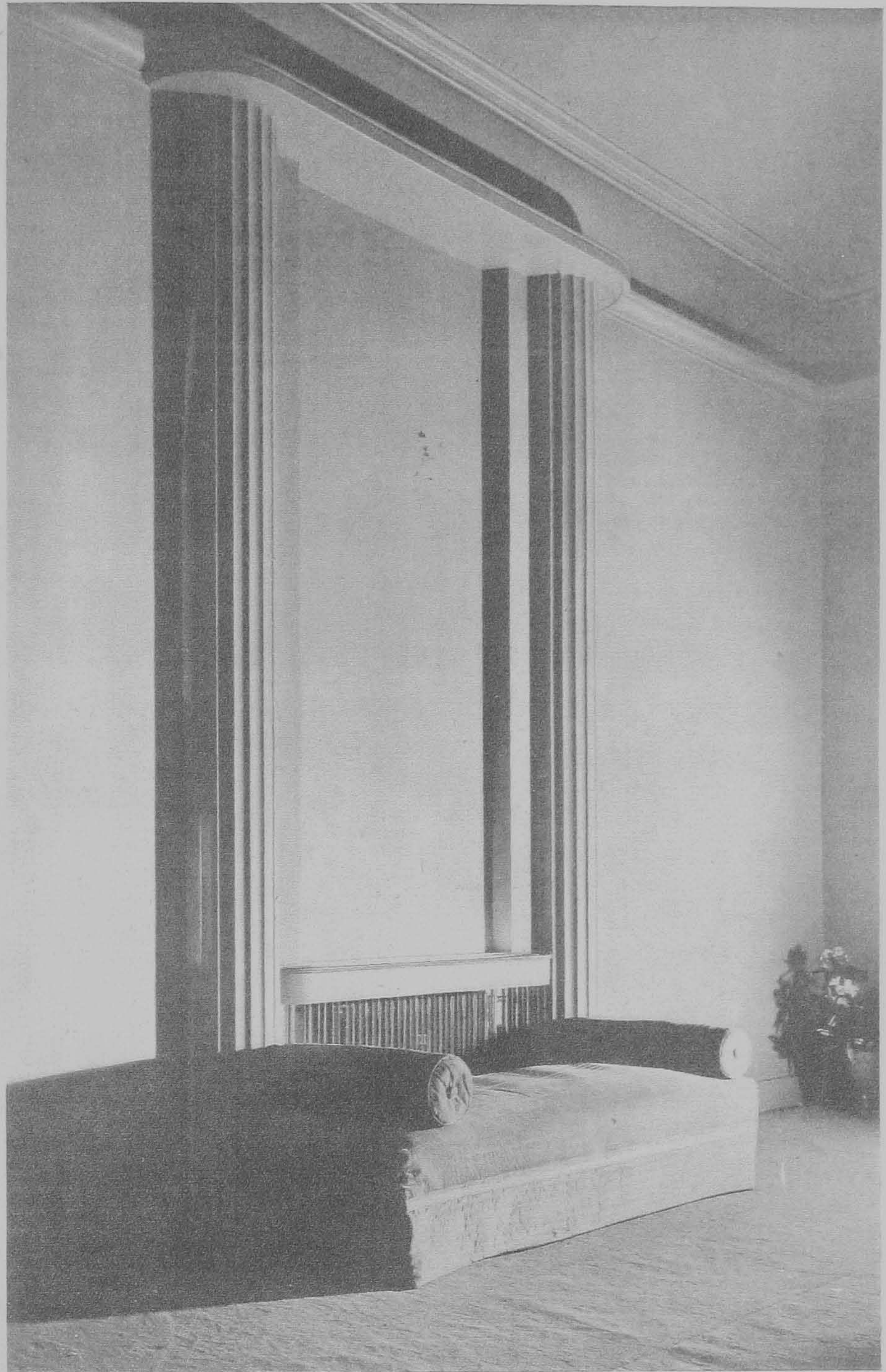
LIBERTY'S  
REGENT STREET

Figure 6.15 Advertisement for Liberty's, c.1930, Liberty Archive, City of Westminster Archive, 788/107.



# WORKING DETAILS : 191

WALL TREATMENT • DRESS SHOWROOM IN BRUTON STREET • GERALD LACOSTE



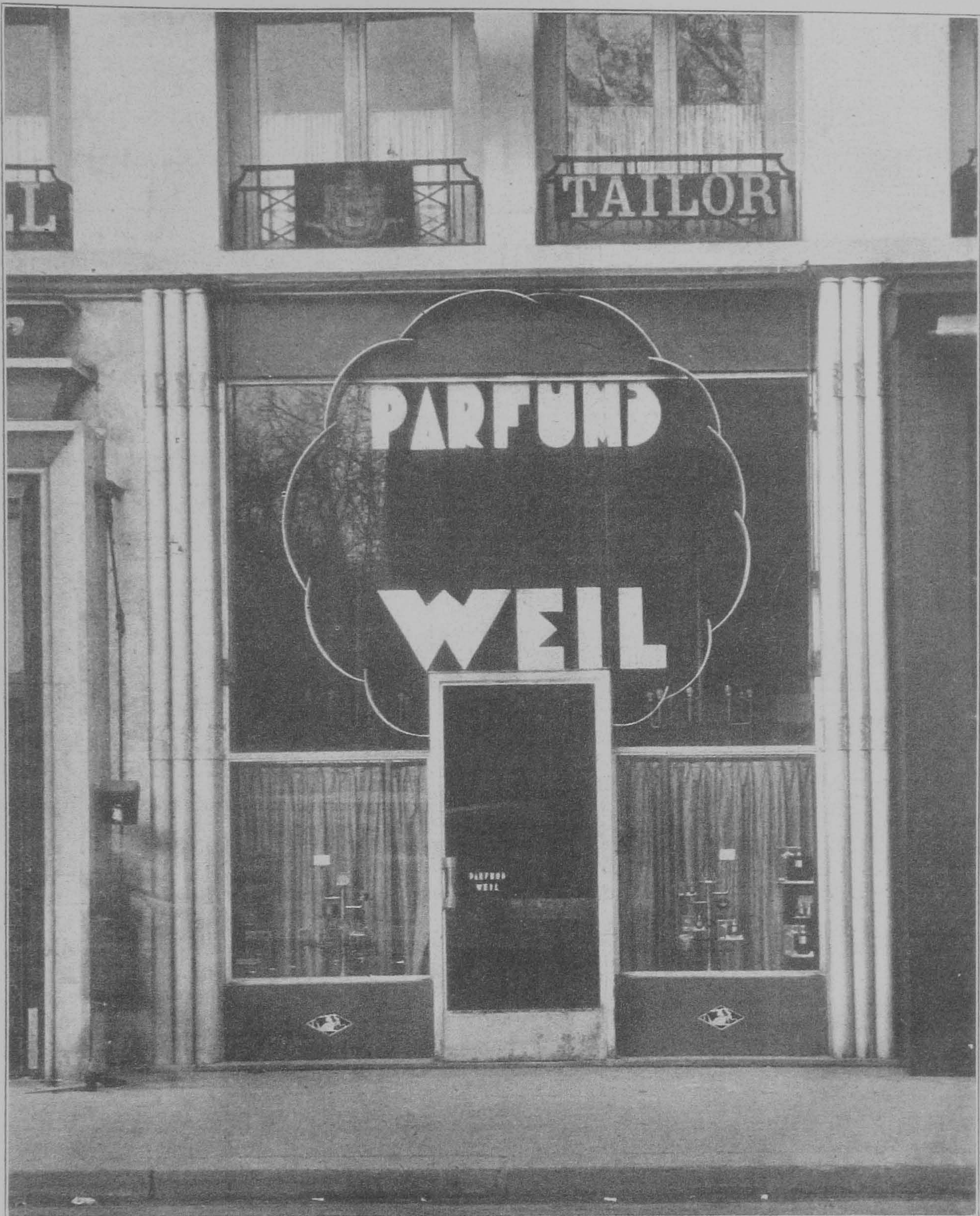
The wall treatment illustrated above was carried out during the conversion of an existing building into a showroom for the display of dresses. The colour scheme is of silvery grey-green, both for paintwork, upholstery and carpets: vertical lighting is provided from a box below the glass shelf at the back of the settee. Plan, elevation and sections are illustrated overleaf.

Figure 6.16 Interior of a showroom for Norman Hartnell in Bruton Street by Gerald Lacoste, *Architects' Journal*, 17 January, 1935.









*Fig. 1.—A perfume shop in the Boulevard Haussmann. The metalwork is in silver finish, the bands at the base and head of the window are in a brown material. The general tone of the interior is in mauve.*

## PERFUMES, FLOWERS, CLOTHES AND ART Some Recent Paris Shopfronts—II

By HOWARD ROBERTSON, F.R.I.B.A., S.A.D.G., and F. R. YERBURY.

Figure 6.18 *Architect and Building News*, 27 March 1931, 445



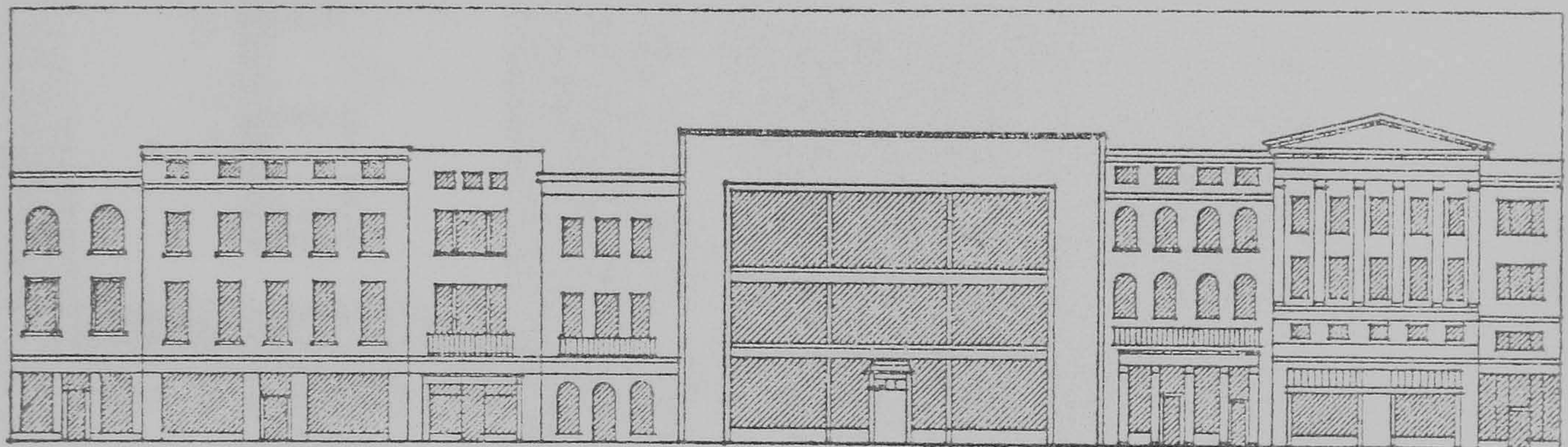


FIG. 5.—INCURSION OF MODERN "STORE" IN OLD-FASHIONED STREET

Figure 6.19 A. Trystan Edwards, *The Architecture of Shops*, London: Chapman and Hall, 1933, 11



CHANGING LONDON.

W H G



[Specially drawn for the SUNDAY TIMES by Hanslip Fletcher.]

Nos. 22 and 23, Savile Row, dating back to 1710, to be acquired by Westminster City Council for demolition so that Savile Row will be projected into Conduit Street in order to relieve congestion in Bond Street and Regent Street.

Figure 6.20 'Changing London', *The Sunday Times*, 6 April 1930





Figure 6.21 45 and 46 Piccadilly awaiting demolition in 1937, London Metropolitan Archives, B4714 45





Figure 6.22 Savile Passage, 1933, National Monuments Record.



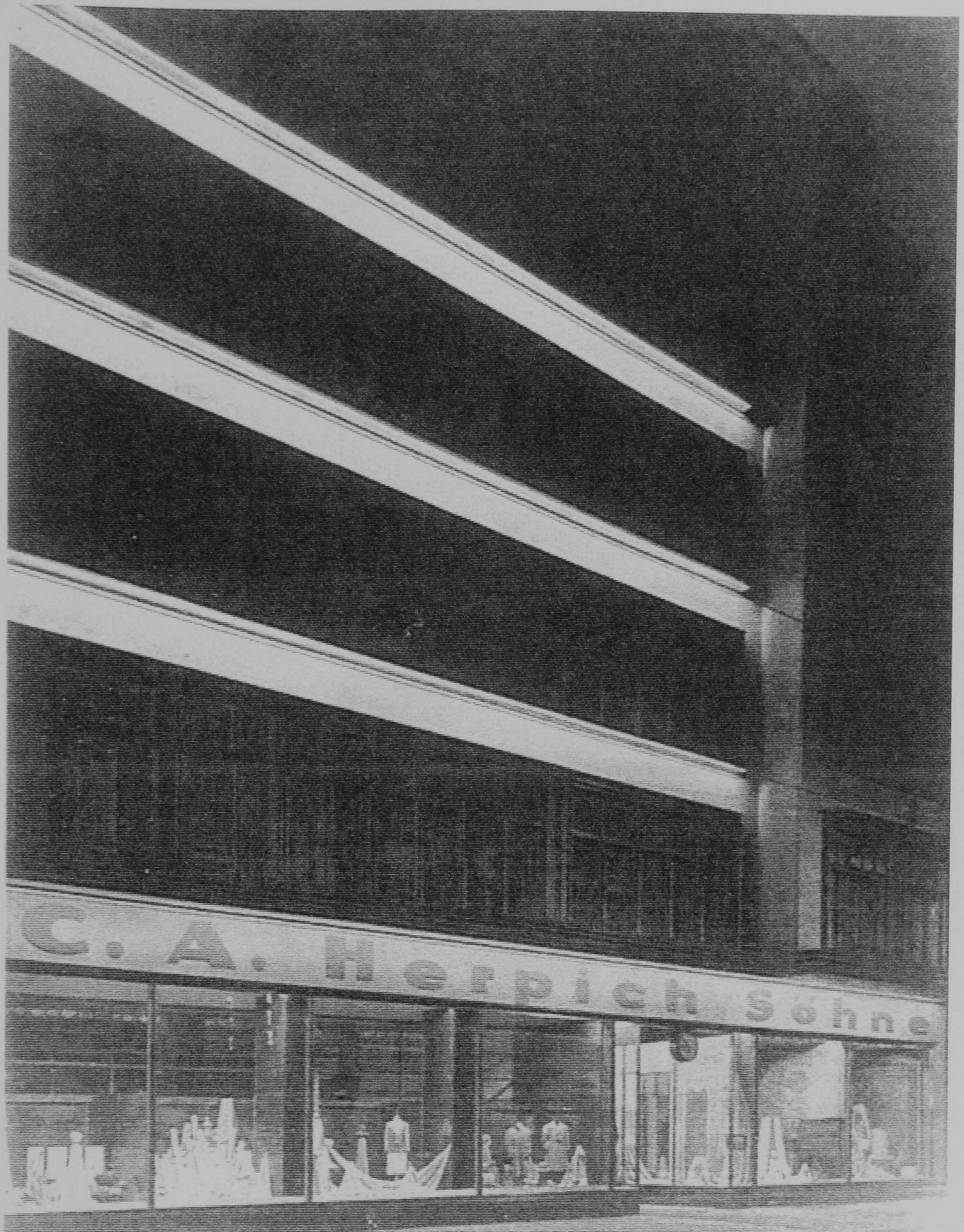


Figure 6.23 C. A. Herpich Söhne Furriers, c.1924, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Kunstbibliothek, Reproduced in Kathleen James, *Erich Mendelsohn and the Architecture of German Modernism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, 149





Figure 6.24, Schocken Department Store, Chemnitz, Germany, 1928-30. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Kunstbibliothek, reproduced in Kathleen James, *Erich Mendelsohn and the Architecture of German Modernism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, 193.





## A CHEMIST'S SHOP IN BOND STREET, LONDON

Architect: Percy Bartlett, A.R.I.B.A., Nottingham

Figure 6.25 *Architect and Building News*, 20 June 1930, 88.



May 8, 1936

THE ARCHITECT & BUILDING NEWS



*The Jermyn Street elevation.*

157

Figure 6.26 Simpsons' Jermyn Sreet facade, *Architect and Building News*,  
8 May 1936,157.





Figure 6.27 Peter Jones, *Architectural Review*, June 1939, 292.





The coat to the left, which we call the 'Harley,' is a Chesterfield of particularly conservative cut.

We sell it mainly in Oxford greys—to professional and business men who have to study a rather quiet appearance. On the right you see what is perhaps the most fashionable and popular of all Simpson coats just now. We are selling more of this model than any other—chiefly in blues and greys, with a neat 'towny' pattern. We call it the 'Piccadilly'—and it will stand a lot of hard daily wear without losing any of its smart appearance. There are Simpson coats of every type—from 5 guineas.

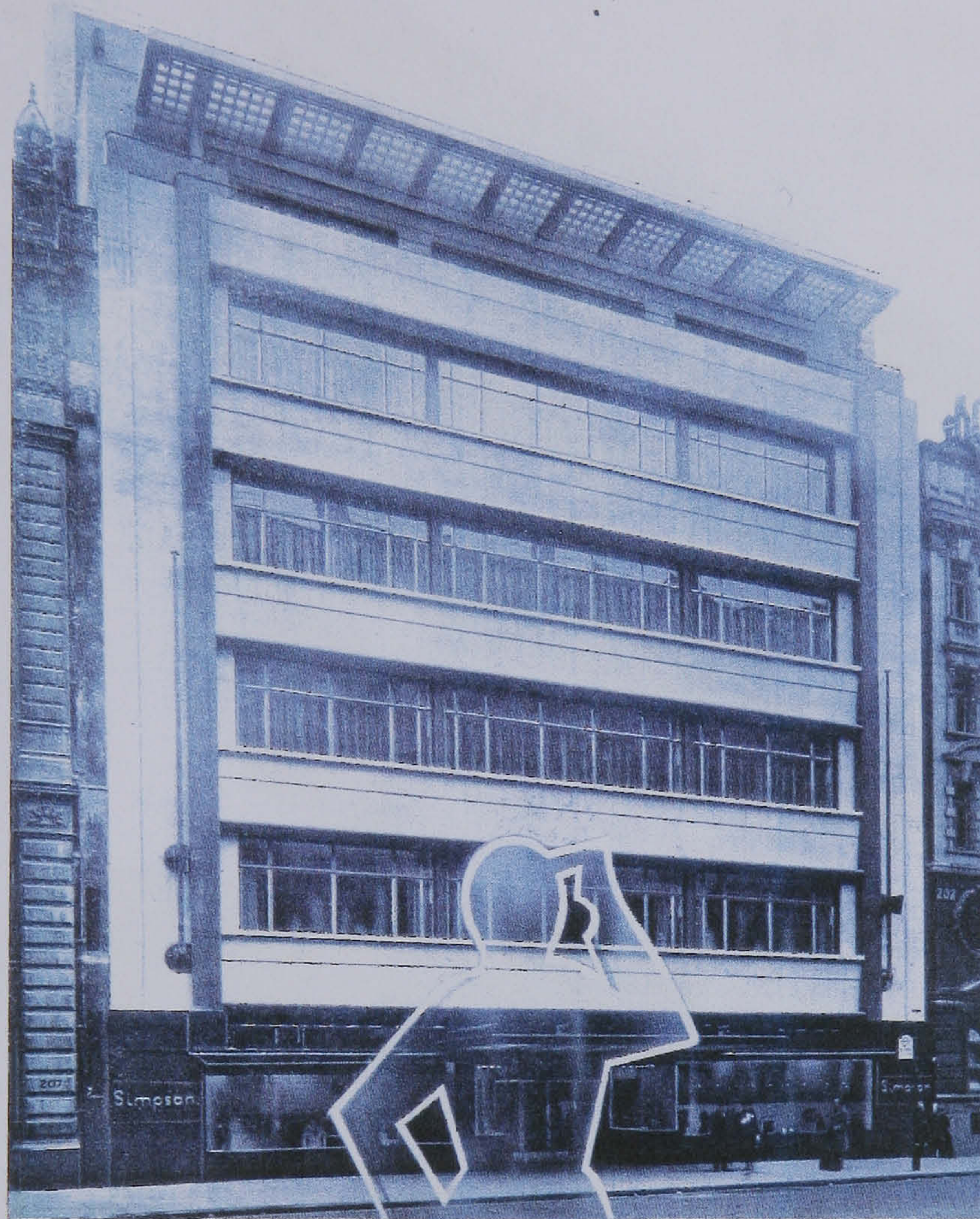
**THERE IS A SIMPSON AGENT IN YOUR DISTRICT**

•SIMPSON PICCADILLY (202 PICCADILLY; W.1) WILL BE PLEASED TO GIVE YOU HIS NAME

Figure 7.1 Simpsons Advertisement, *Daily Mail*, 20 October 1936



# GLASS in Simpson's



*Architect :*  
JOSEPH EMBERTON,  
A.R.I.B.A.

*Builders :*  
JOHN MOWLEM  
& CO., LTD.

## EXTERIOR GLAZING

## THERMOLUX

Lantern Light  
Glazing.

## "VITROLITE"

panelling and par-  
titions and also the

## MIRRORS

in the Lavatories on  
all floors.

*A comprehensive con-  
tract entrusted to:—*



# JAMES CLARK

& SON, LIMITED

SCORESBY ST., BLACKFRIARS,  
LONDON, S.E.1

Telephone: Waterloo 4611 (10 lines)

Branches :  
CANTERBURY : BOURNEMOUTH : EASTBOURNE

xxxix

c

Figure 7.2 Advertisement for James Clark, *Architectural Review*, June 1936, pxxxix



**COPPER**

for catching  
the public  
**EYE**

1. Copper sheathing. Simpsons, Piccadilly. Architect, Joseph Emberton, F.R.I.B.A.

2. Copper display counter. Austin Reed of Regent Street. Architects, J. P. Westwood and Sons.

3. Copper alloy columns. Main entrance to the Dolcis Shoe Shop, Oxford Street. Architect for shop front, H. Sincok.

Simoson

Copper is attractive. It weathers pleasantly. Indoors its lustre can be maintained. Copper looks rich, yet it has scarcely ever cost less than it does to-day. Of decorative and constructional value, no other material expresses so well the combination of usefulness and beauty which is the make-up of the modern shop. Copper and its alloys cost little to maintain. For counters, display stands, show cases, and general architectural "trim", there is nothing to equal it. Choose copper.

Technical information about copper for display purposes can be obtained from the C.D.A. The technical resources of the Association are at your free disposal.



A.28.

**COPPER DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION**

THAMES HOUSE, MILLBANK, LONDON, S.W.1.

Telephone: VICTORIA 3912.

Telegrams, Cables: "CUPRUM, LONDON."

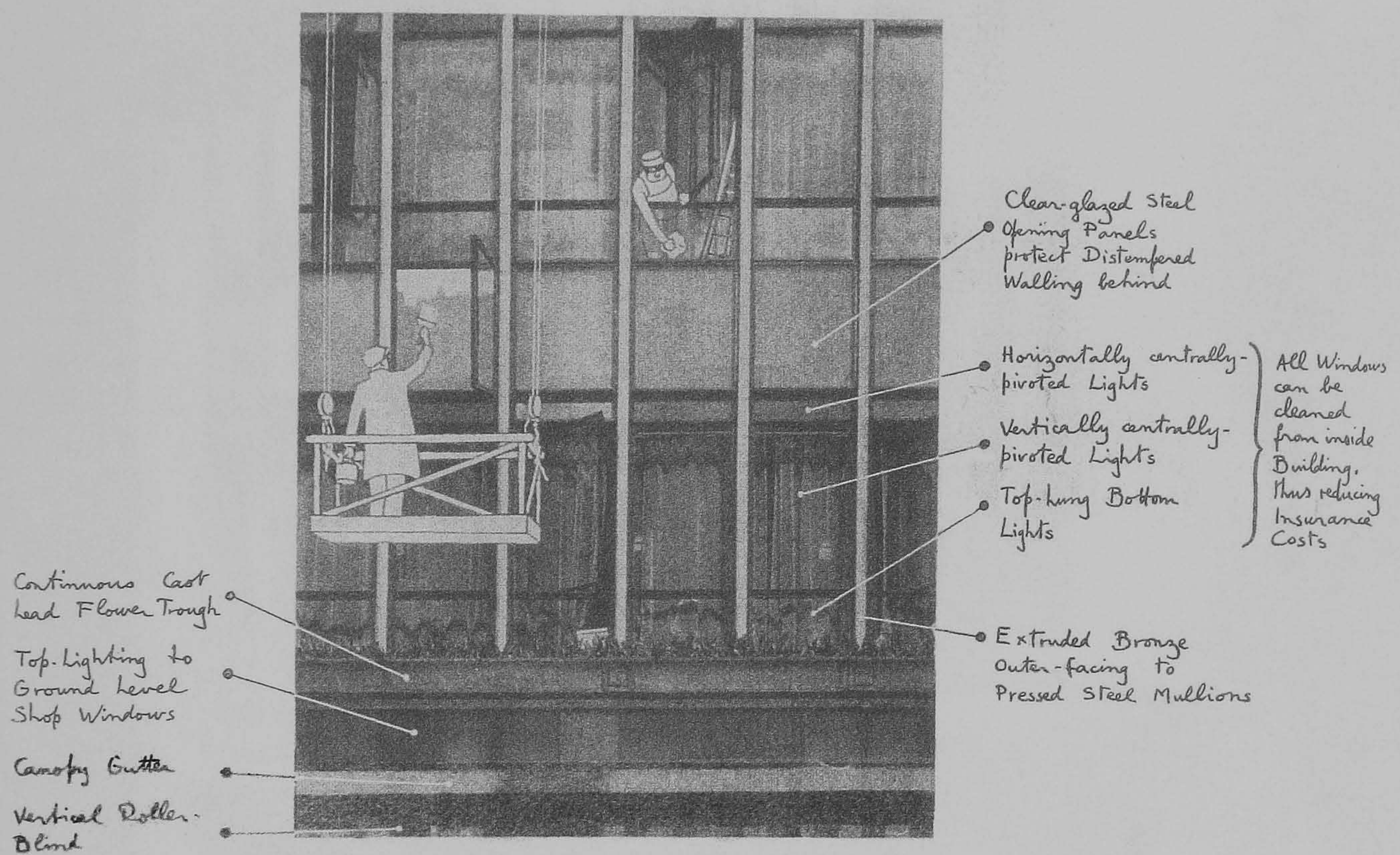
xxvi

Figure 7.3 Advertisement for the Copper Development Association, *Architectural Review*, November 1936, p.xxvi.



# The Exterior

## ENTRANCE, CANOPY AND WALL FACING



295

Figure 7.4 Section of walling, Peter Jones, photographed in the *Architectural Review*, June 1939, 295



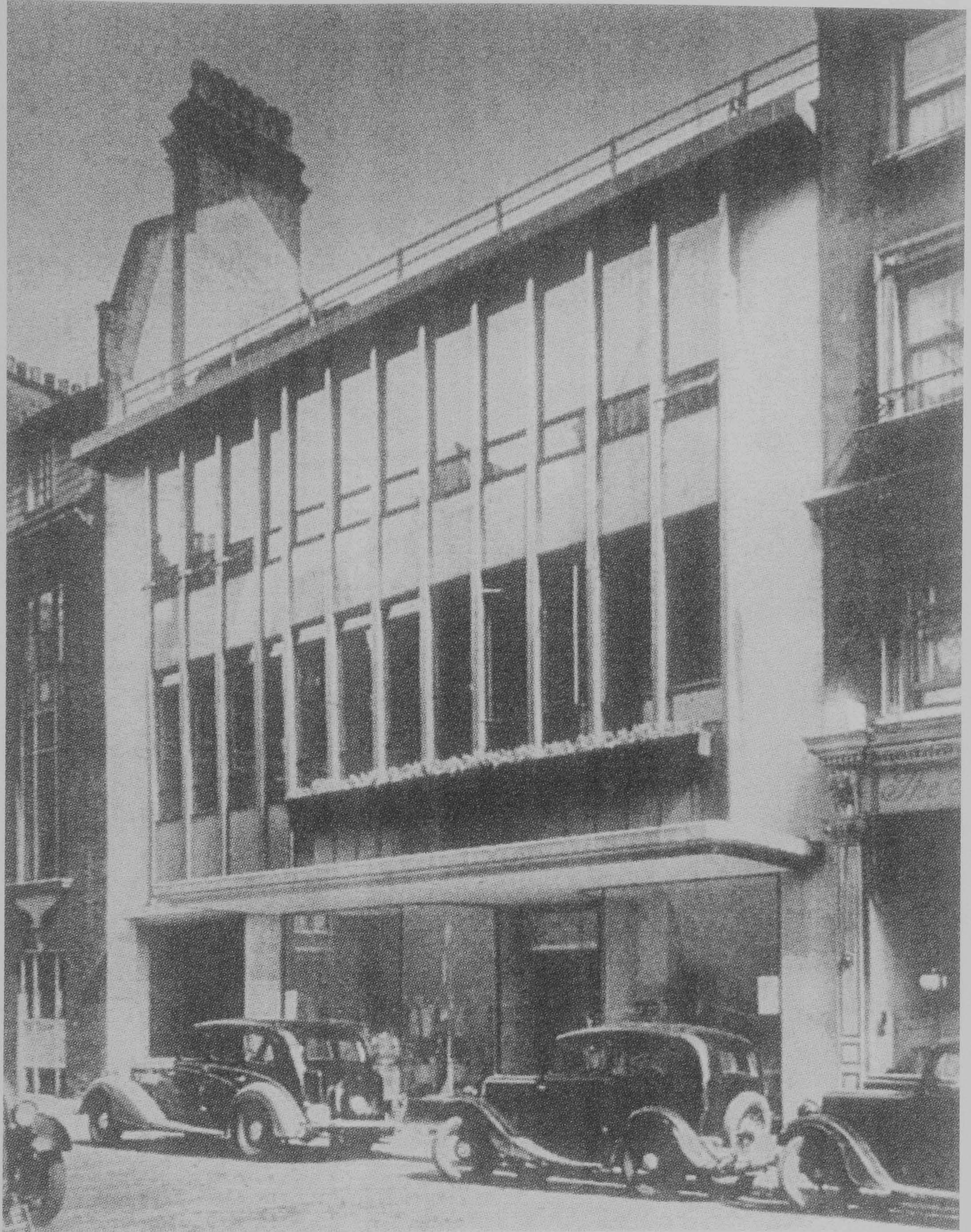


Figure 7.5 Experimental section, Peter Jones, photographed in the *Architectural Review*, June 1939, 295.



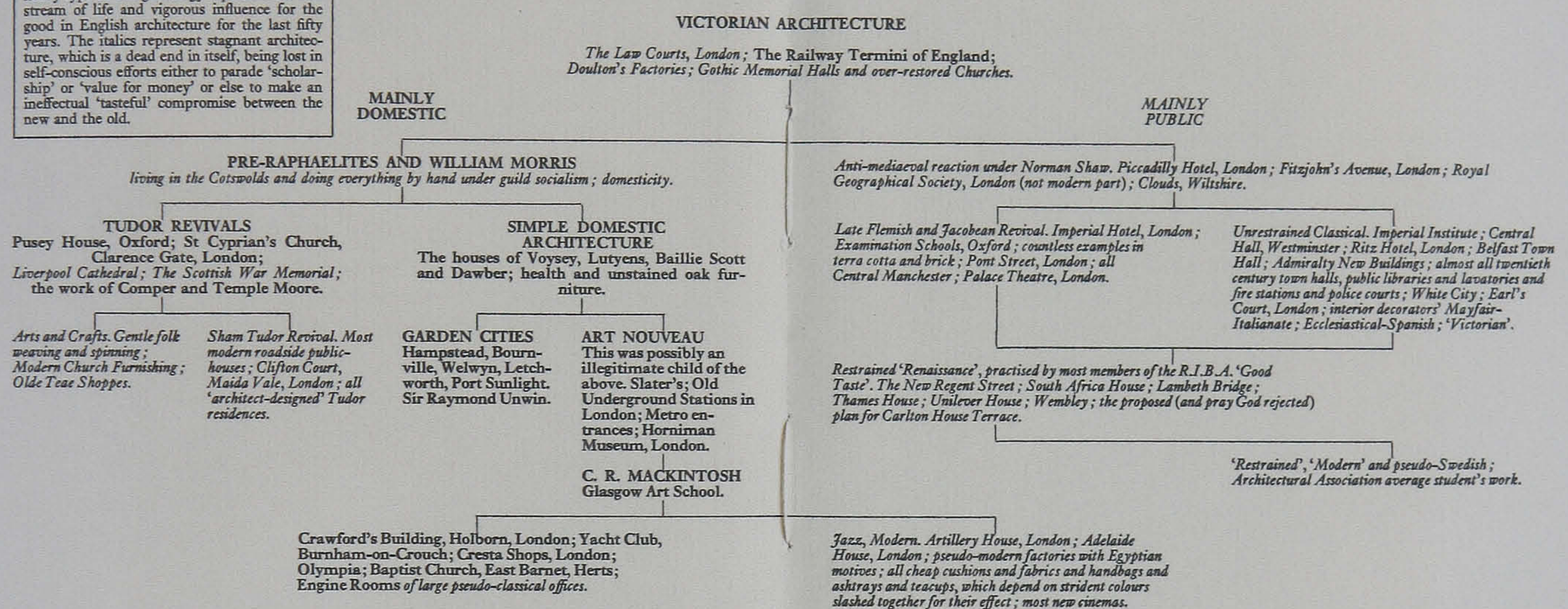


Figure 7.6 'Functional', Osbert Lancaster, *Homes Sweet Homes* London: John Murray, 1939, 77.



## THE GROWTH OF 'GOOD TASTE'

NOTE.—Buildings and architects shown in heavy type in this genealogy represent the thin stream of life and vigorous influence for the good in English architecture for the last fifty years. The italics represent stagnant architecture, which is a dead end in itself, being lost in self-conscious efforts either to parade 'scholarship' or 'value for money' or else to make an ineffectual 'tasteful' compromise between the new and the old.



## THE DEEP PIT OF SPECULATIVE BUILDING

Figure 7.7 John Betjeman, *Ghastly Good Taste: or a Depressing Story of the Rise and Fall of English Architecture*, London: Anthony Blond, 1970 (first pub. 1933), 108-9.



*MANSFIELD - REPORTER*  
REPORTER AND SUTTON-IN-ASHFIELD TIMES, FRIDAY, JULY 22, 1938.

# MARKS AND SPENCER

LIMITED



**THE FAMILY  
STORE**

**NOW OPEN AT**

**10-14 WESTGATE**

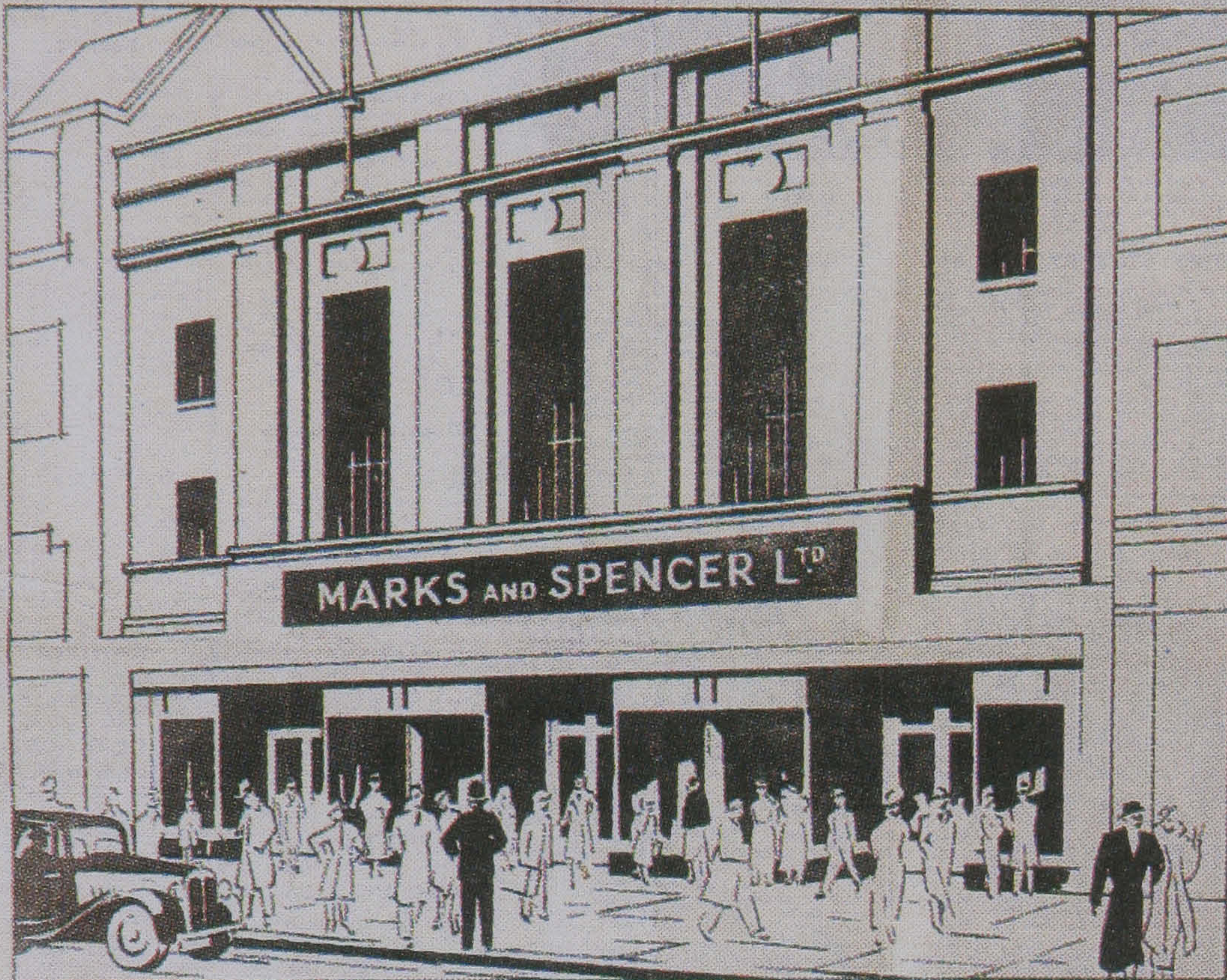
**MANSFIELD**

Figure 7.8 *Mansfield Reporter and Sutton-in-Ashfield Times*, 22 July 1938 reproduced in Asa Briggs, *Marks and Spencer 1884-1984: A Centenary History*, London: Octopus, 1984, 41.



# MARKS AND SPENCER LTD.

426-434 Holloway Road



## OPEN TODAY new super store

Nothing over 5/-

Join our Weekly Clubs

Special display of

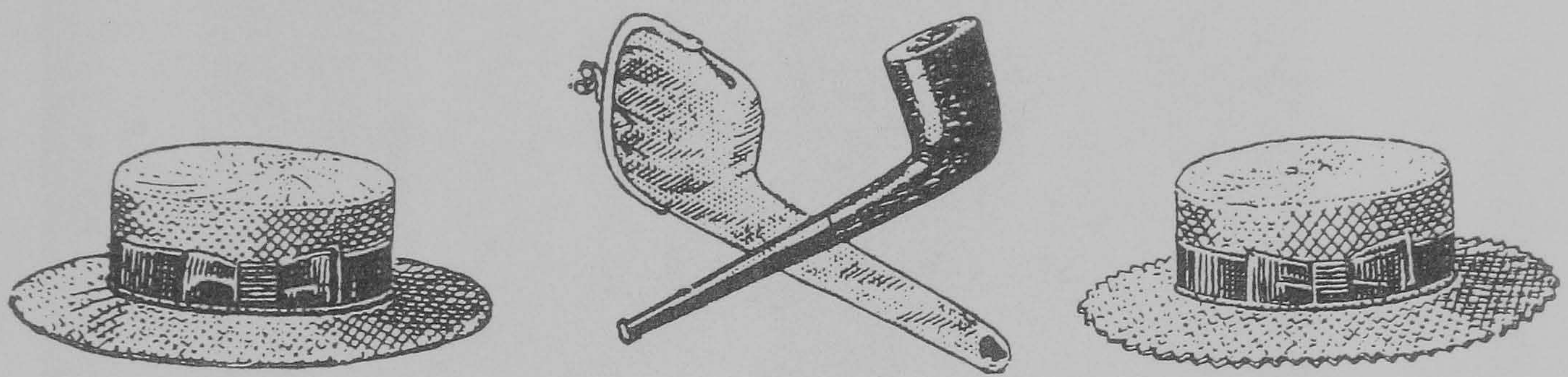
Ladies' and Children's Drapery •  
Ladies', Men's and Children's Hosiery  
• Men's and Boys' wear • Children's wear  
• Footwear • Rugs • Lighting • Fancy  
goods • Toilet • Toys • Canned goods •  
Fresh Fruit • Confectionery • Biscuits • Records

Be amongst the first to visit our  
Cooked Meats counter, where  
you can choose from all manner  
of appetising fare to take home,  
including Cooked Meats, Bacon,  
Cheese, Meat Pies, Kippers, etc.

The finest quality at keenest prices

Figure 7.9 *The Islington and Holloway Press*, 21 November 1936, reproduced in Asa Briggs, *Marks and Spencer 1884-1984: A Centenary History*, London: Octopus, 1984, 45.





Saderne, Paris.

Figure 7.10 Illustration from *Decorative Art of Today* of 1925, republished in Le Corbusier, *Essential Le Corbusier: L'Esprit Nouveau Articles*, Oxford: Architectural Press, 1998.





VIONNET FROM TIZIANA

**Modernism in black and red**

Red crêpe slashed with black satin might easily have made a merely sensational dress, but with this startling combination Vionnet achieves extreme sophistication and distinction. The red crêpe is of seemingly simple cut and the black satin is drawn horizontally across the décolletage and straight down the skirt. From Tiziana, Baker Street.

Figure 7.11 *Vogue*, 30 September 1931, 53



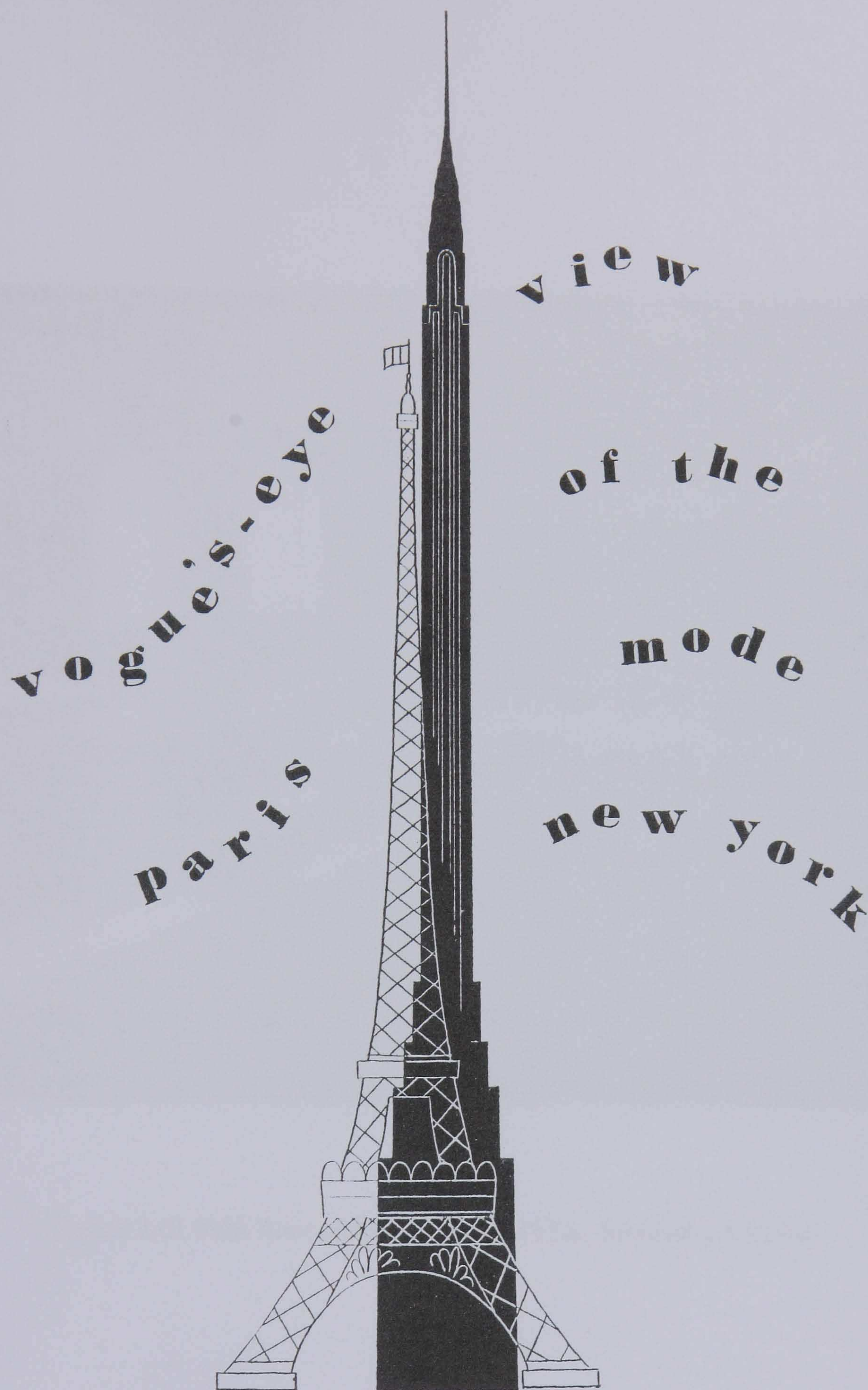


Figure 7.12 *Vogue* (New York), 26 April 1930, 35.





Figure 7.13 Fifth floor clubroom, c.late 1930s, Simpsons Archive.





Figure 7.14 Simpsons' Overcoat department on the first floor, 1936, Simpsons Archive.





Figure 7.15 Wardrobe of overcoats, 1936, Simpsons Archive.





Figure 9.1 Window shoppers at Liberty, Oxford Street, c.1928, Liberty Archive, City of Westminster Archive, 788/118.





Figure 9.2 Window shoppers at Liberty, Oxford Street, c.1928, Liberty Archive, City of Westminster Archive, 788/118.





Figure 9.3 Ernő Goldfinger's shop for H. Weiss photographed for *Architectural Review*, August 1936, 85.





Figure 9.4 Peter Jones, *Architects' Journal*, 9 July 1936, 55.



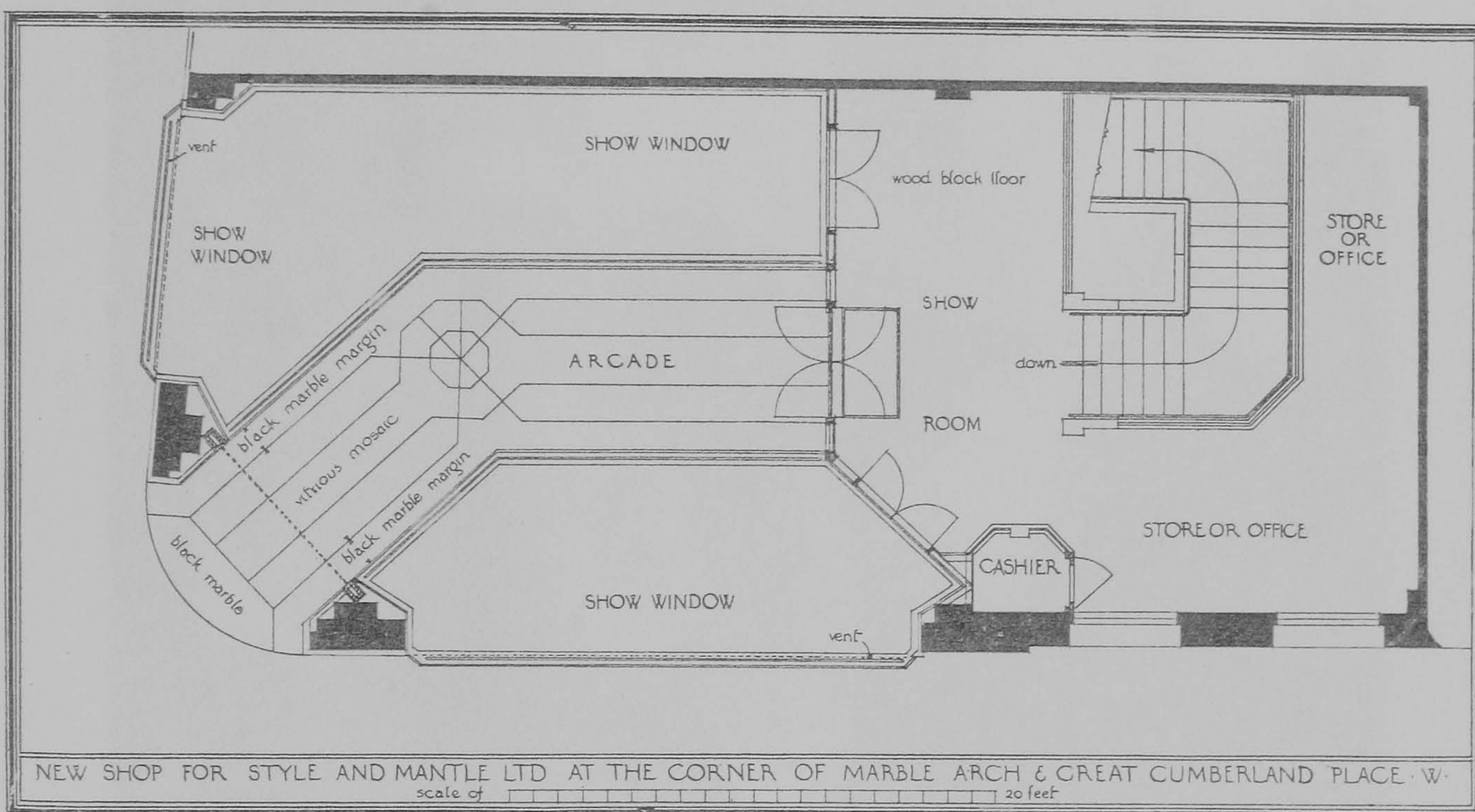


Figure 9.5 Ground floor plan of Style and Mantle, *Architect and Building News*, 22 August 1930, 243.





“Can’t beat these new windows in wet weather, Willie.” —*Passing Show*.

Figure 9.6 *The Outfitter*, 9 May 1936





*Illustration shows the two invisible glass windows at Simpsons, Piccadilly, each 20 feet long—the largest in the world.*

# Invisible GLASS

By W. T. Hurworth

Figure 9.7 'Invisible Glass', *Store*, December 1936, 73.





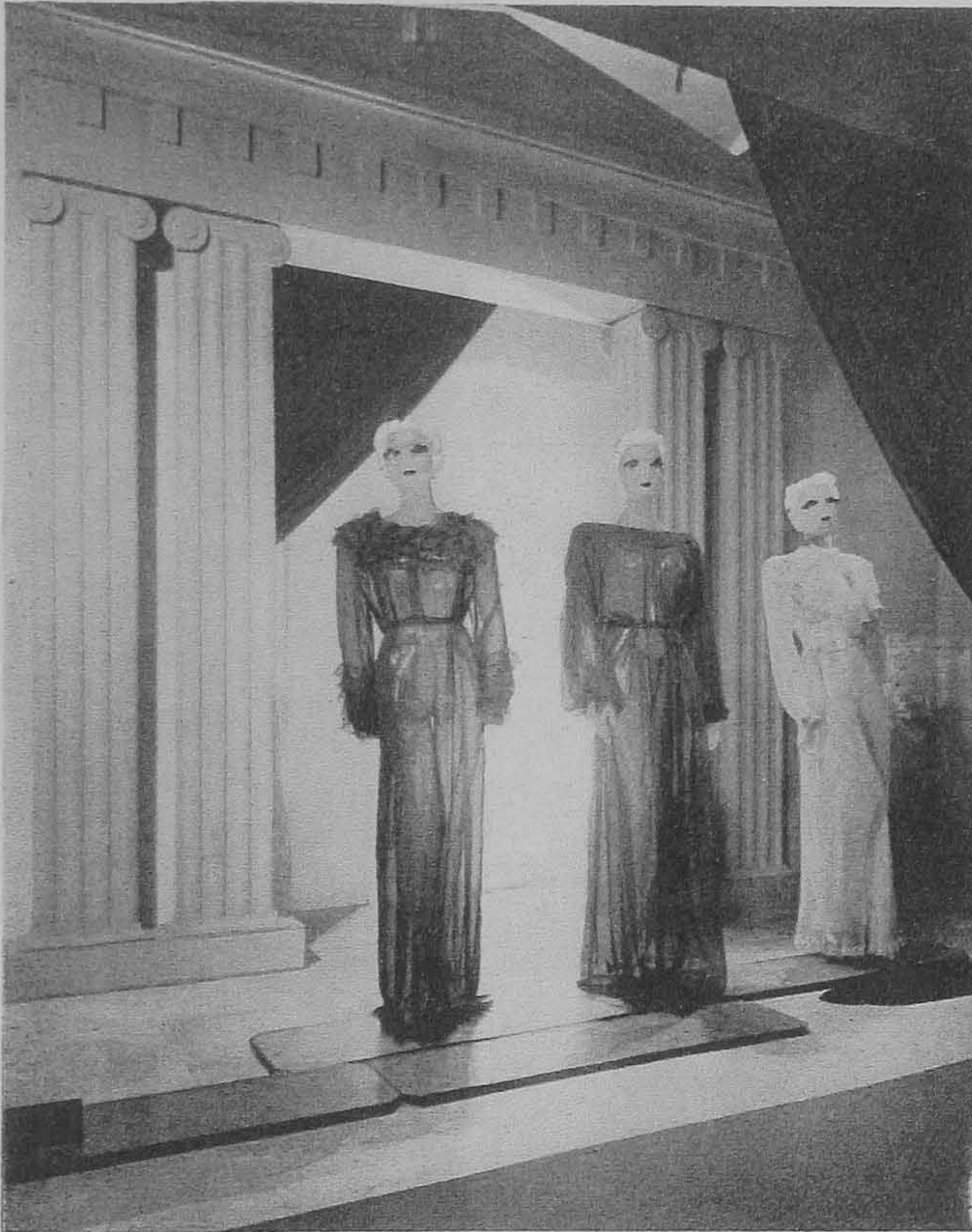
## Kathe Kruse **D**ramatises **D**isplay

BY NATURAL POSING OF LIFE-LIKE MODELS

*Above. How many real people here? Actually the answer is "None." Both customer and assistant are Kathe Kruse models, posed with lifelike detail. The contrast with the conventional figure in the centre is striking.*

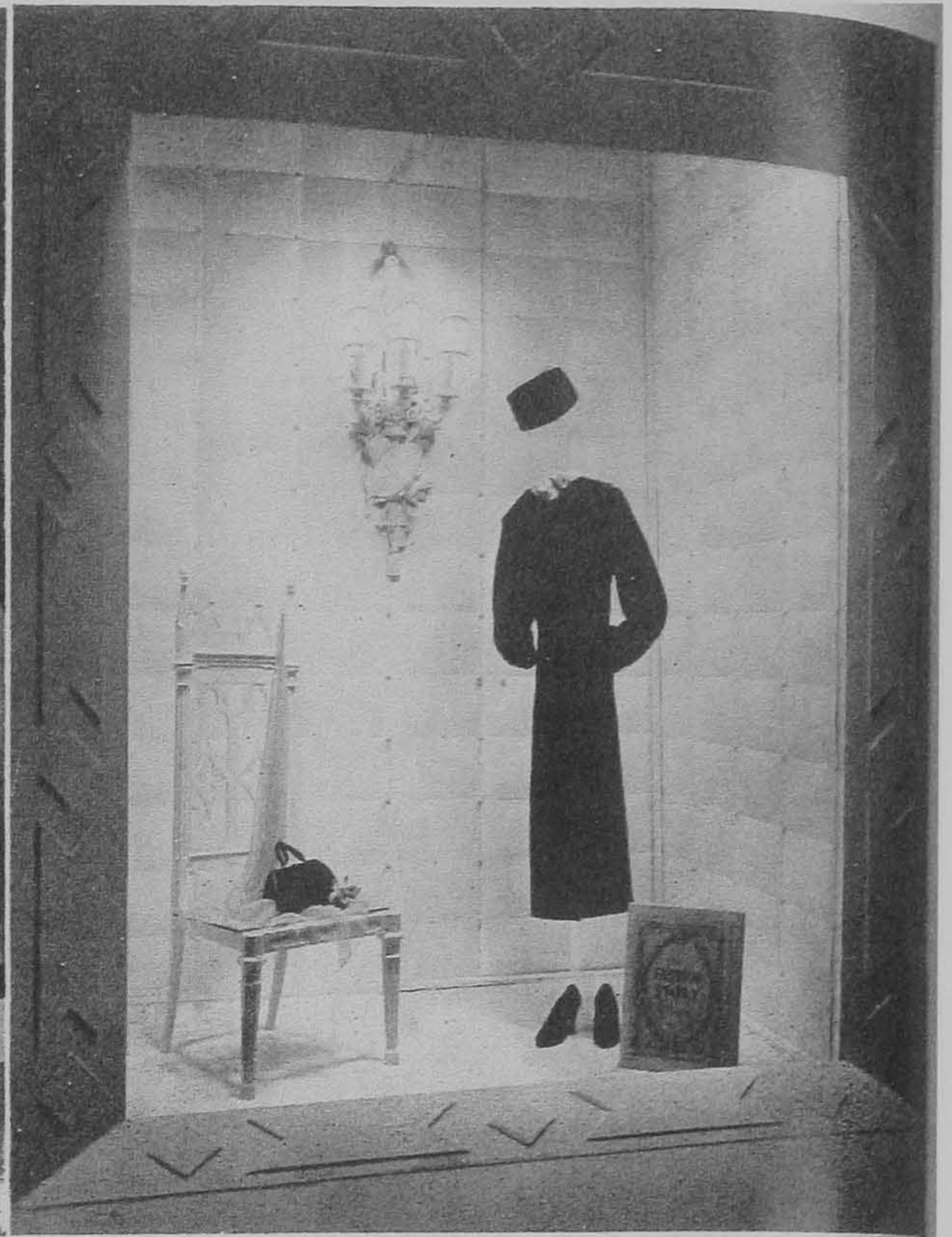
Figure 9.8 'Kathe Kruse Dramatises Display', *Store*, February 1936, 140.





#### TRANSPARENT WOMEN

Cellophane figures in chiffon nightdresses with lights behind give translucent effect and daintiness.

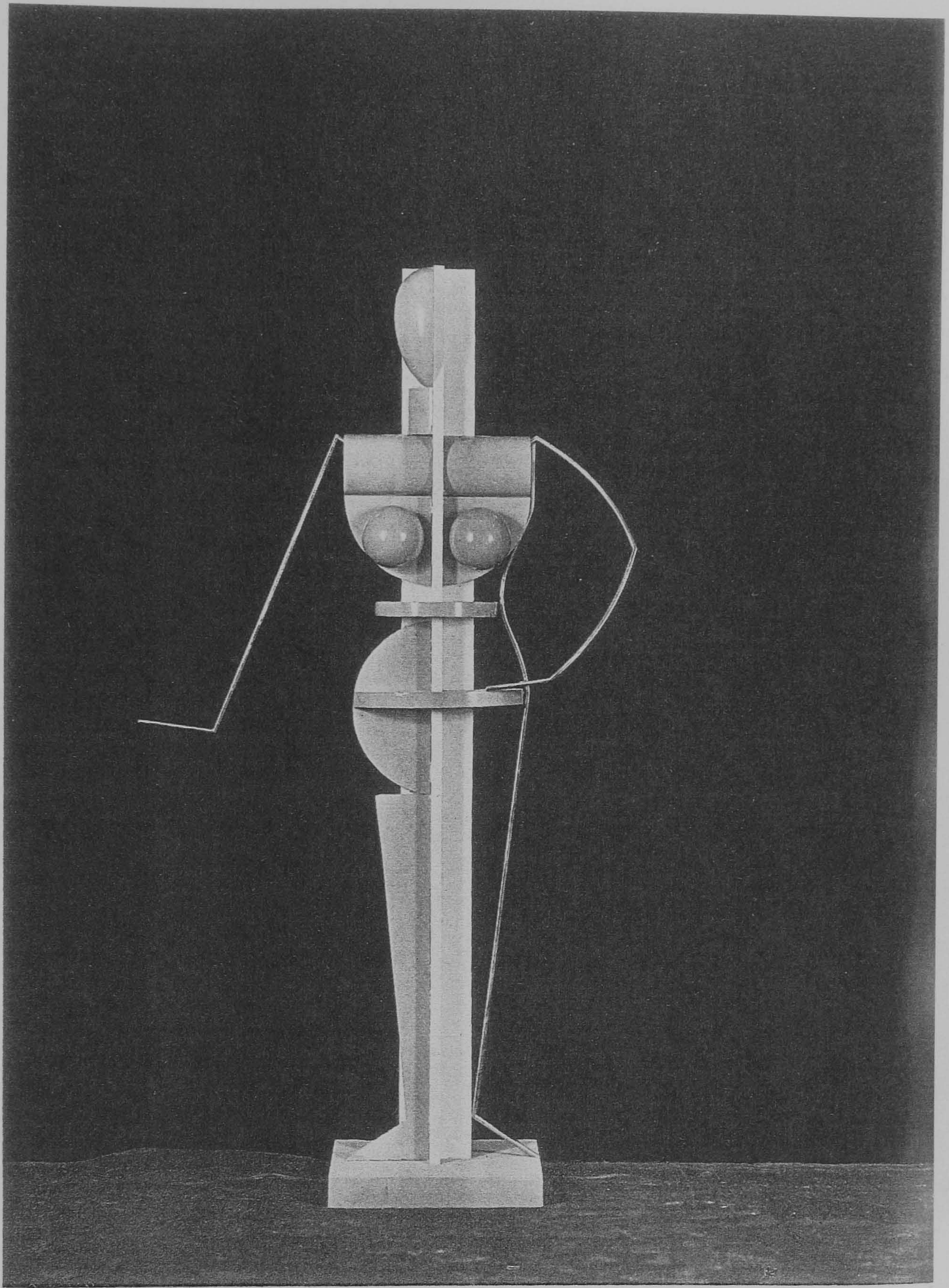


#### INVISIBLE MANNEQUIN

White satin quilted background, antique furniture sprayed white, invisible mannequin suspended with cotton.

Figure 9.9 'Transparent Women/Invisible Mannequin', *Art and Industry*, March 1938, 104.





*A "synthesis of modern womanhood" in the shape of a mannequin for the display of ready mades. Model by Siegel made of wood with wire arms*

Figure 9.10 'Exit Wax', *Commercial Art*, February 1931, 54.



The window above shows a display of deck suits. The two ship's ventilators are cut out of beaver board and the rails are chromium. One of the figures is holding a handkerchief, behind which is an electric fan that makes it wave. Below is a display of Austin Reed's "Pebble Grain" gloves. The three large gloves are about 6 feet in length and the grain is proportionately enlarged

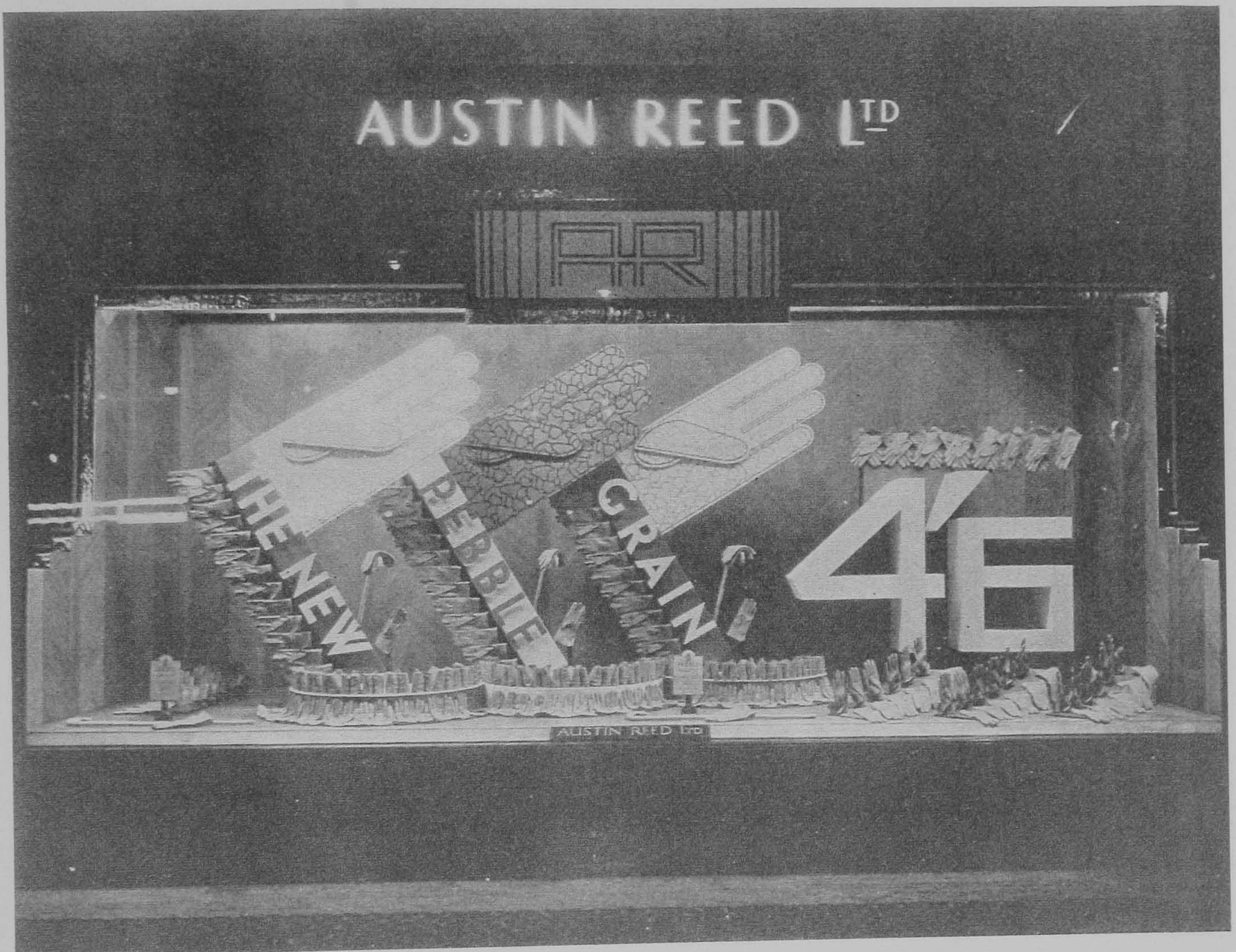


Figure 9.11 Austin Reed window, *Commercial Art and Industry*, June 1933, 233.





## A “DESIGNED” WINDOW DISPLAY IN NEW BOND STREET, W.1

Figure 9.12 ‘A “Designed” Window Display in New Bond Street, W1’, *Architectural Design and Construction*, July 1936, 306.





Figure 9.13 Daks display, c.late 1930s, Simpsons Archive.





Figure 9.14 Austin Reed in Oxford Street, *Architectural Design and Construction*, April 1936, 203.





Figure 9.15 Simpsons' back entrance in Jermyn Street, 1948, National Monuments Record.



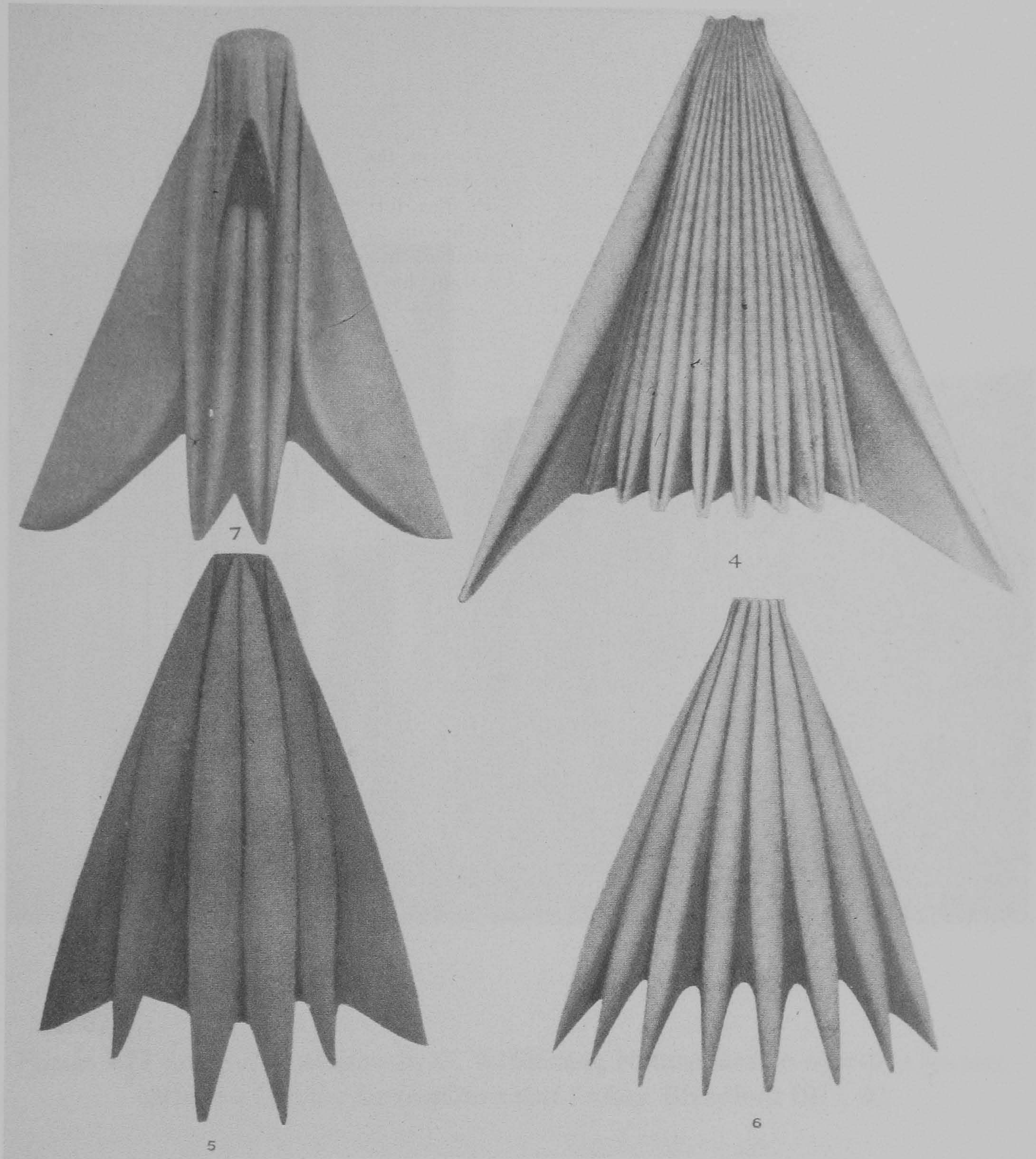


Figure 9.16 *Window Display for Outfitters and Tailors*, London: Blandford, 1935, 6.



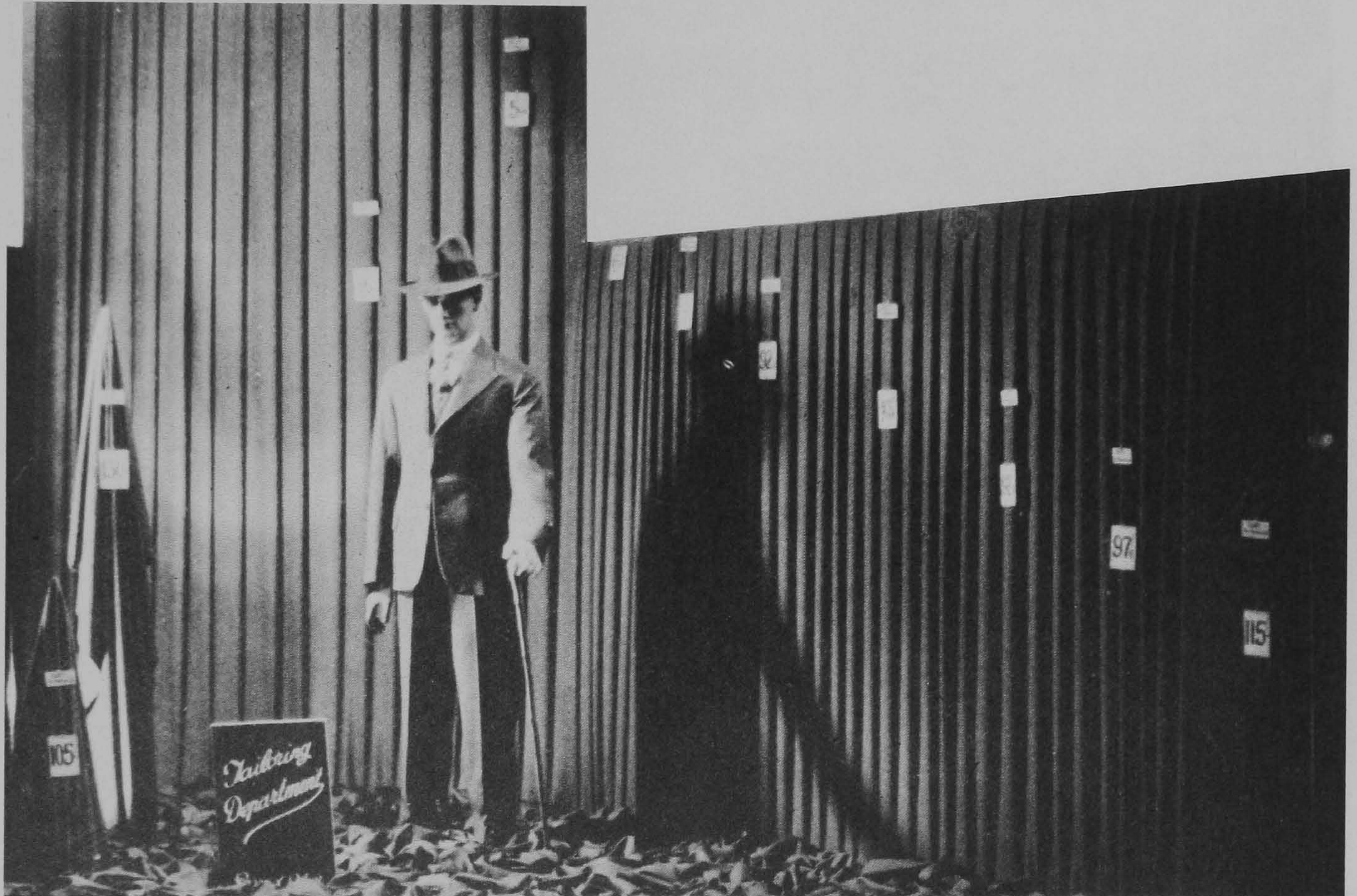


Figure 9.17 A tailoring window by G. W. Skinner, Nottingham Co-operative Society, *Window Display for Outfitters and Tailors*, Blandford 1935, 82





FIG. 27.—The 200-year-old shop-front of Messrs. Hawkes & Co., Ltd., in Savile Row, which was replaced by that shown in Fig. 28.

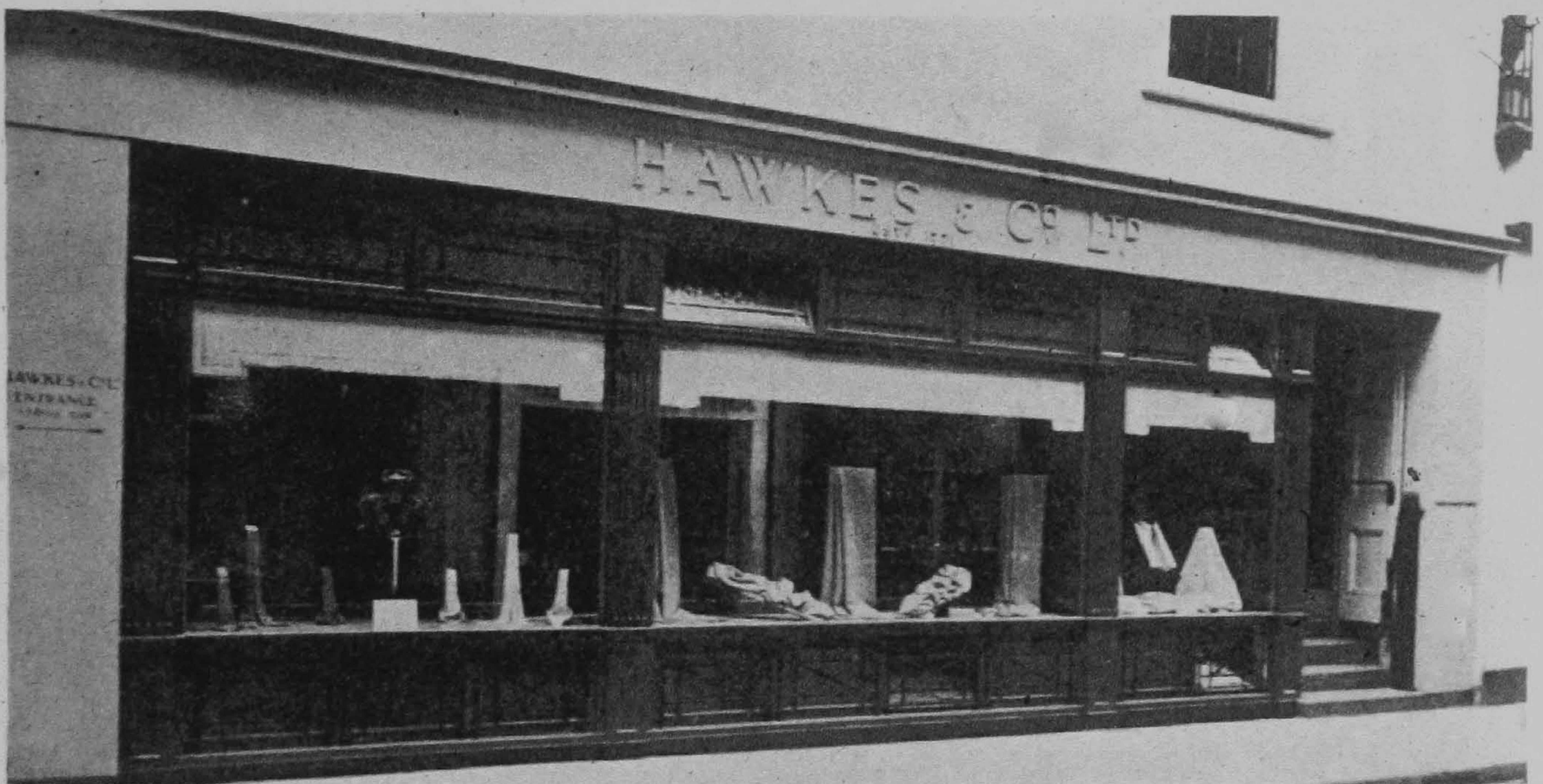
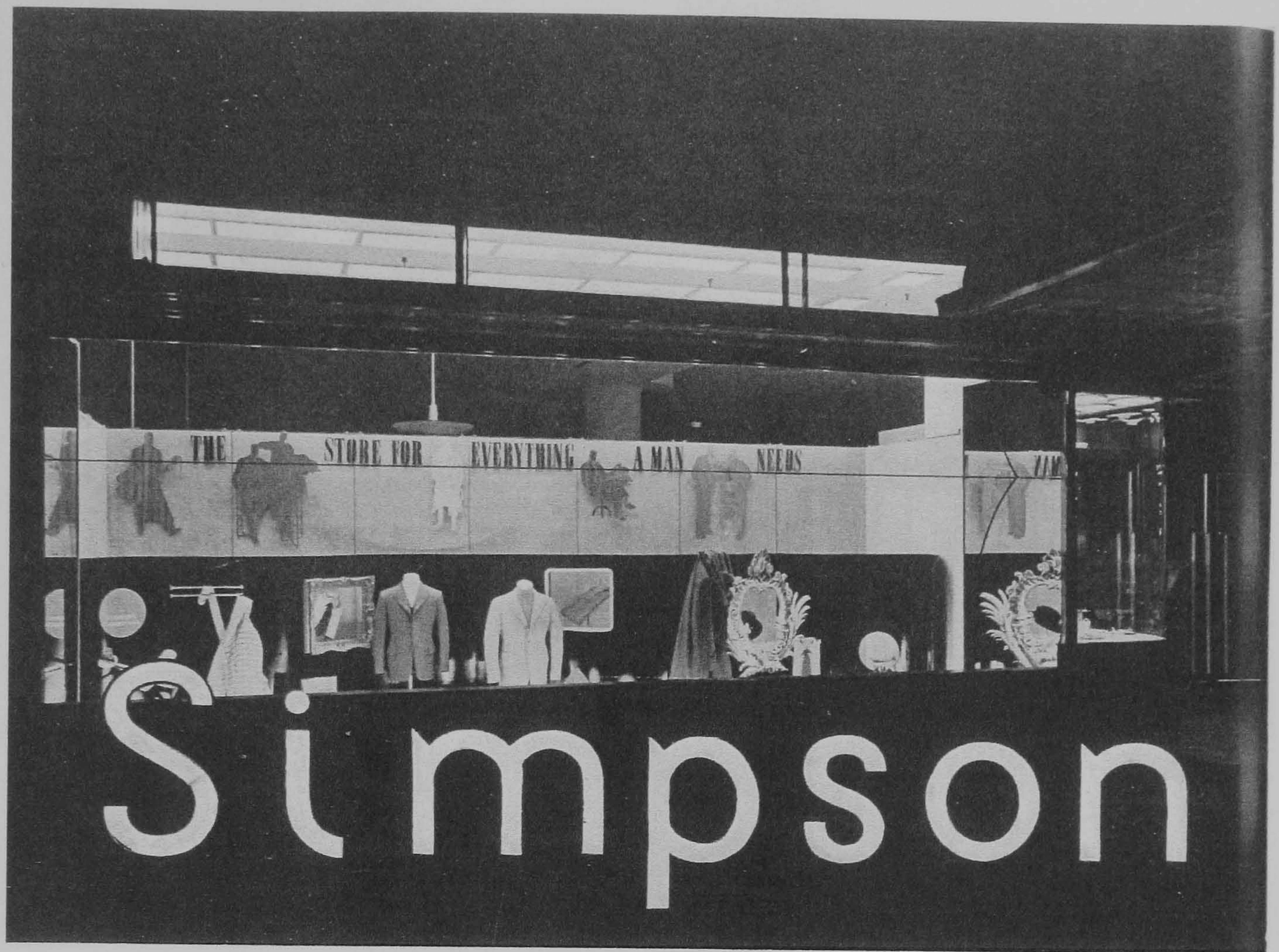


FIG. 28.—The modern exterior of Messrs. Hawkes & Co., Ltd., with three large display windows.  
(Courtesy : E. Pollard & Co., Ltd.)

Figure 9.18 A. Edward Hammond (ed.) *Men's Wear Display: A Practical Work on Window Showmanship and Interior Planning and Equipment*, London: Caxton c.1930, 28





## DISPLAY LESSONS FROM A NEW STORE

*A new man's store makes a great display effort: Here are impressions and criticisms by the expert and the man in the street.*

Figure 9.19 'Display Lessons from a New Store', *Art and Industry*, July 1936, 18.





JAC

PLATE I.

A background design on geometric principles but which gives adequate expression to the idea of gifts.

PLATE 2.

This distinctive setting could be used to great effect in a men's wear window. (By courtesy of "Display World.")

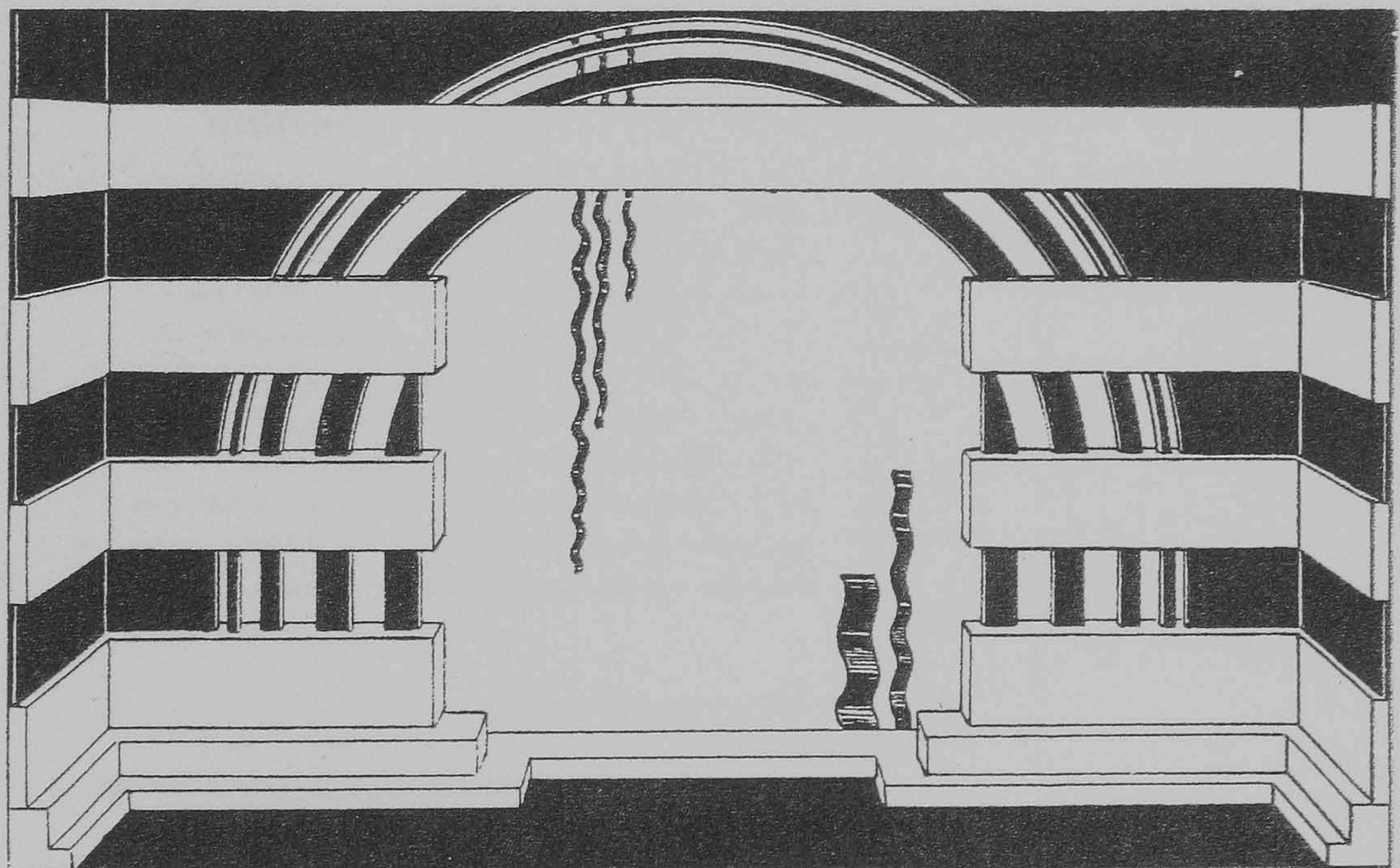


Figure 9.20 *Window Display for outfitters and Tailors*, London: Blandford, 1935, 19.



**WESTMINSTER**

**AGAIN CHOOSES**

**GAS**

gas to light **REGENT ST., PALL MALL, WHITEHALL** till 1947...

Great modern cities must have their streets brilliantly lit . . . reliably lit. The City of Westminster has again chosen to light 55 miles of its streets—brilliantly . . . reliably . . . by gas . . . and for another 15 years ♦ A great contract . . . just signed . . . affecting more than half the West End of London . . . running until 1947 . . . given to gas. ♦ Not only in the City of Westminster but in nearly a hundred other municipalities streets are lit by the Gas Light & Coke Company. 50,000 street lamps in all. ♦ A big undertaking? Yes. But only a tiny fraction of the Company's whole load for cooking and heating in more than a million London homes and over 2,000 London trades.

DOVENTRY STREET  
ALDWYCH  
KINGWAY  
FLEET STREET  
QUEEN VICTORIA STREET  
BIRDCAGE WALK  
VICTORIA STREET  
BUCKINGHAM GATE  
CONSTITUTION HILL  
CARLTON HOUSE TERRACE  
ST. JAMES'S STREET  
SACKVILLE STREET  
SAVILLE ROW  
JEREMY STREET  
MILLBANK  
CHARING CROSS ROAD  
KINGS ROAD  
BATEWATER ROAD

★  
World famous London  
Streets lit by gas.

THE GAS LIGHT AND COKE COMPANY, Horseferry Road, Westminster, S.W.1

Figure 10.1 Advertisement for the Gas Light and Coke Company, *Commercial Art and Industry*, November 1932, 186.





Figure 10.2 Front Cover, *London: The World's Largest City*, Edinburgh:  
A. Walker and Son, 1938.





Figure 10.3 Piccadilly Circus c.1920s, London Transport Museum.





*A night view of Empire Hall. The elevation has been specially designed to allow the horizontal shapes formed by the fenestration to be flood-lit without shadows. The building is flood-lit from the marquise.*

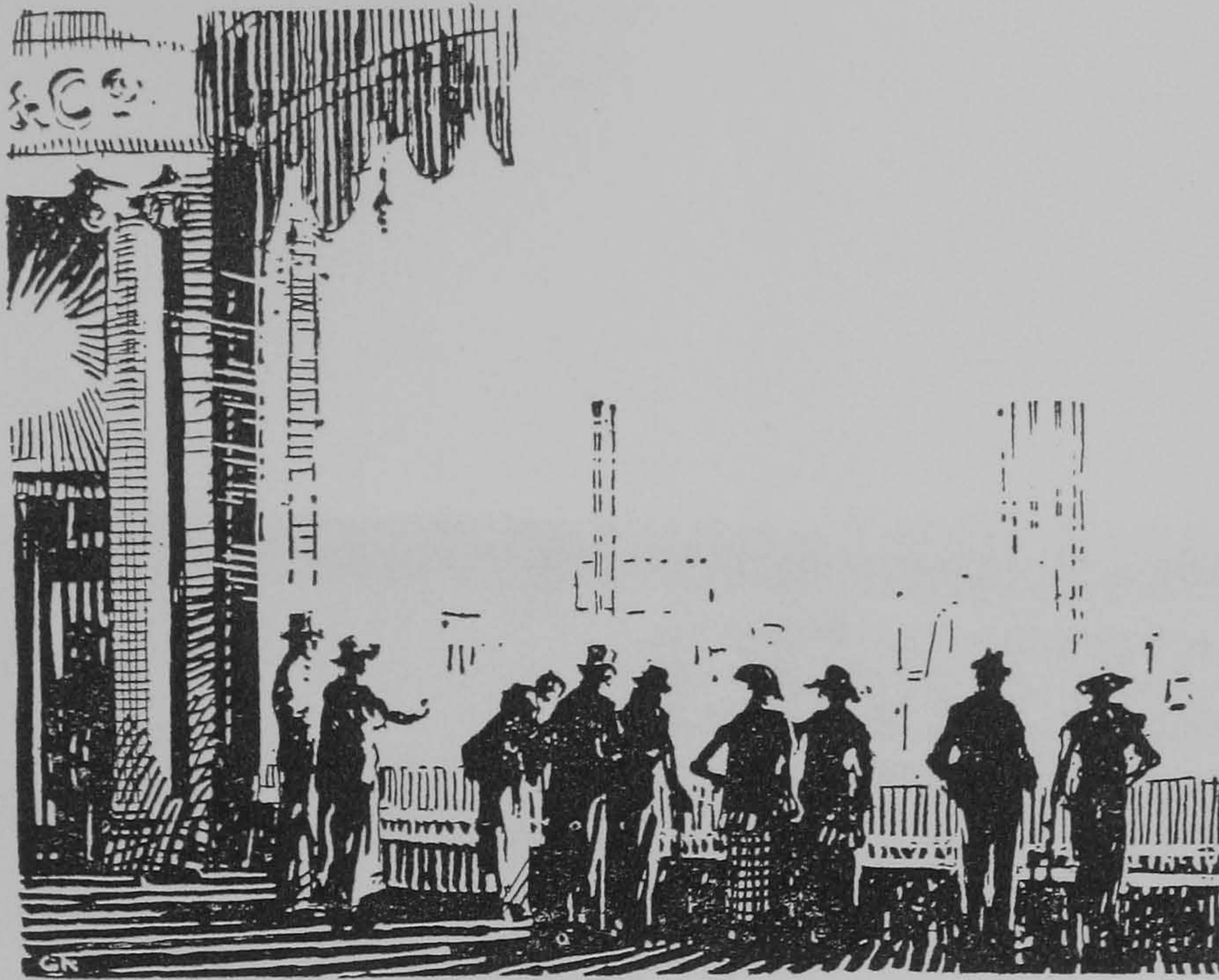
Figure 10.4 The Empire Hall, Kensington Olympia at night, *Architectural Review*, June 1930, 320





Figure 10.5 Simpsons at night, undated, Simpsons Archive





## An excellent advertisement

Light your shop brilliantly and it will become an excellent advertisement. It will attract attention—and customers.

Heat your shop efficiently and healthfully, and it will become an excellent salesman. Your staff will look cheerful and work better; your customers will find comfort and an interested, willing staff—the secret of increased sales.

*Five well-illustrated magazines which fully describe modern efficient lighting and heating equipment in shops and stores will be sent free to any one interested, on application to the address below.*

Ask for booklets Nos. 101, 102, 113, 149, and 188

THE  
BRITISH COMMERCIAL GAS ASSOCIATION  
28, GROSVENOR GARDENS, LONDON, S.W. 1

Figure 10.6 Advertisement for the British Commercial Gas Association, in A. Edward Hammond *Multiple Shop Organisation*, London: Isaac Pitman and Sons, 1930.





**PEOPLE STOP  
AT THE WELL-LIGHTED SHOP**

A Shop that is well lighted will have greater attractiveness than its poorly lighted neighbour. Electric facias, signs, well-lighted windows and brilliant interiors all combine to attract new customers and increase sales.

Write to the address given below for informative literature, or enquire at your local Electric Shop or Showroom.

To the British Electrical Development Association, Inc., 15 Savoy Street, London, W.C.  
(Temple Bar 4569.)

Please send free illustrated book "How to Light the Modern Shop."

Name .....

Address ..... EDA/120

**ELECTRIC LIGHT FOR SHOP WINDOWS · FACIAS · SIGNS AND INTERIORS**

Announcement of The British Electrical Development Association, Inc., 15 Savoy Street, London, W.C.2. Telephone : Temple Bar 4569

Figure 10.7 Advertisement by the British Electrical Development Association, *Drapers Record*, 20 September 1930, 629.



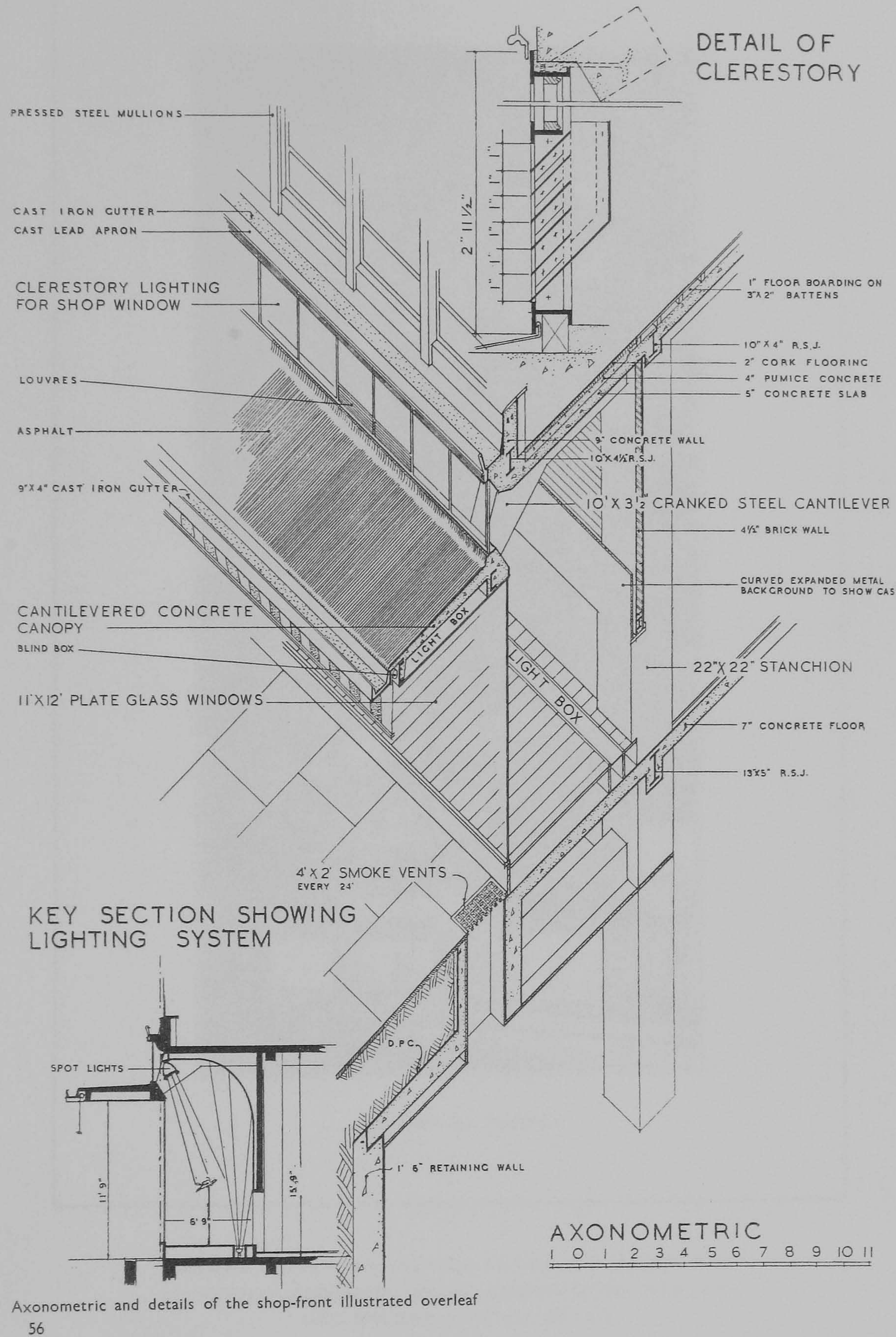
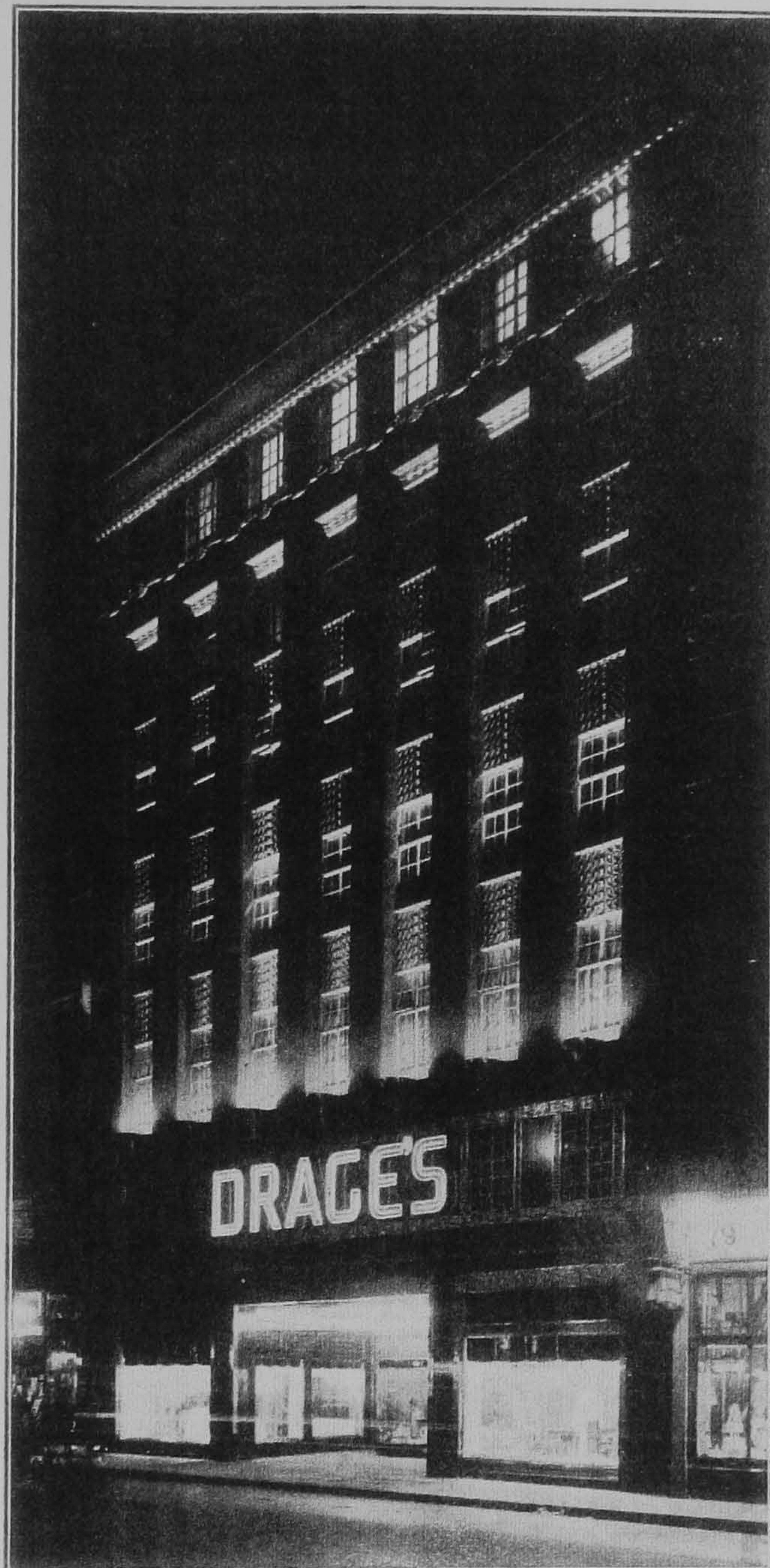


Figure 10.8 Details of window construction at Peter Jones, *Architects' Journal*, 9 July 1936, 56.



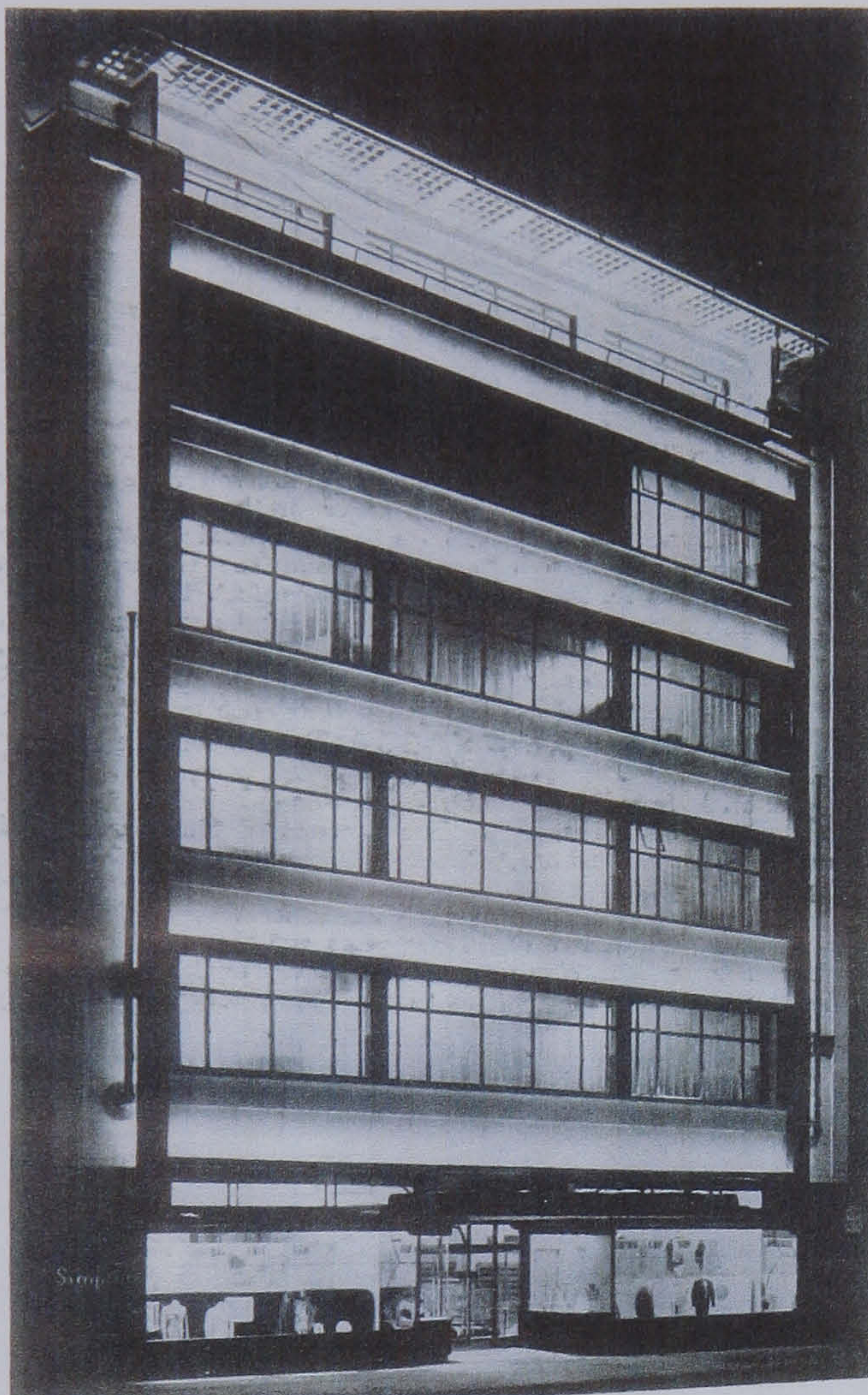


PREMISES BY NIGHT.

MESSRS. DRAGE'S NEW PREMISES, OXFORD ST., LONDON, W.  
ASSOCIATED ARCHITECTS, MESSRS. GORDON JEEVES, F.A.R.I.B.A.  
AND HERBERT A. WELCH, F.R.I.B.A.

Figure 10.9 Drage's by Night, *Architecture Illustrated*, February 1931, 40.





Architect : J. Emberton, F.R.I.B.A.

## The Startling New Display Lighting for **S i m p s o n -** PICCADILLY

The novel manner in which

### CLEORA TUBES

have been used on this new building constitutes a real achievement in display lighting. In addition to the pure white effect, each section can be lit separately, and almost any colour can be produced at will, CLEORA illumination is not only extraordinarily effective but highly efficient and economical in final cost, and in application has the extreme flexibility long desired by architects generally.

**-INSTALLED by CLAUDEGEN**

Only by means of CLEORA TUBES (patented) can comparable results be obtained. CLAUDEGEN are specialists in Display Lighting, Signs, and Illuminated Publicity of every type, and offer to architects their co-operation and expert advice without obligation.

London Enquiries to

**CLAUDE-GENERAL NEON LIGHTS LTD.**



Pitman House · Parker Street  
Kingsway · London · W.C.2. Holborn 7294

Provincial Enquiries to nearest Branch of

**THE GENERAL ELECTRIC CO. LTD.**

Figure 10.10 Advertisement for Claude-General Neon Lights Ltd., *Architectural Review*, June 1936, p.liii.



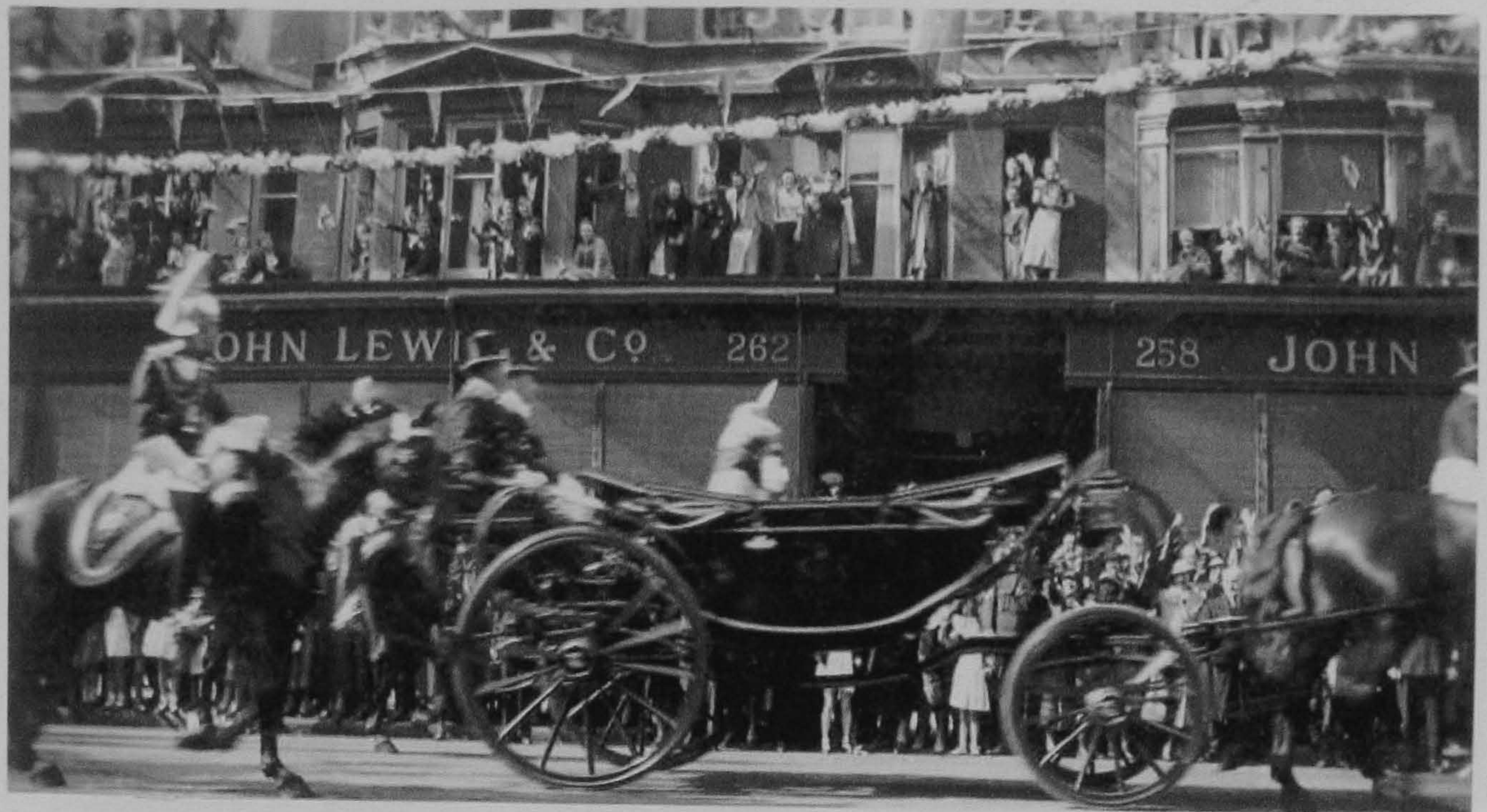
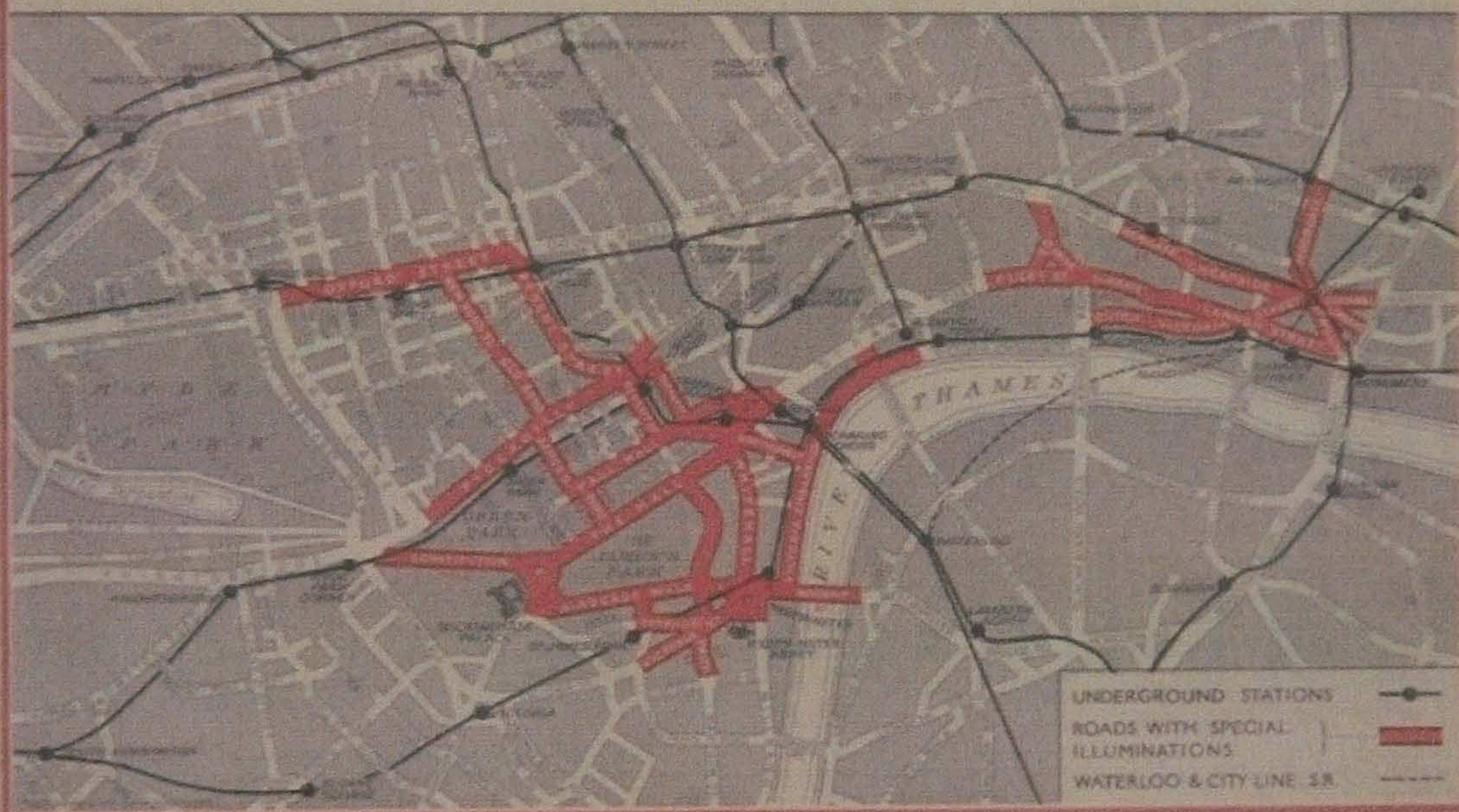


Figure 11.1 Jubilee procession in front of John Lewis Oxford Street, 1935.  
John Lewis Partnership Archive.



# ILLUMINATIONS

Ask at the Ticket Office for an Illuminations and Decorations folder. Avoid the crowded streets so far as you can by  
**TRAVELLING UNDERGROUND**  
Later trains will run from Central area stations.



12-17 MAY

Figure 11.2 Illuminations poster, London Underground, 1937 London Transport Museum



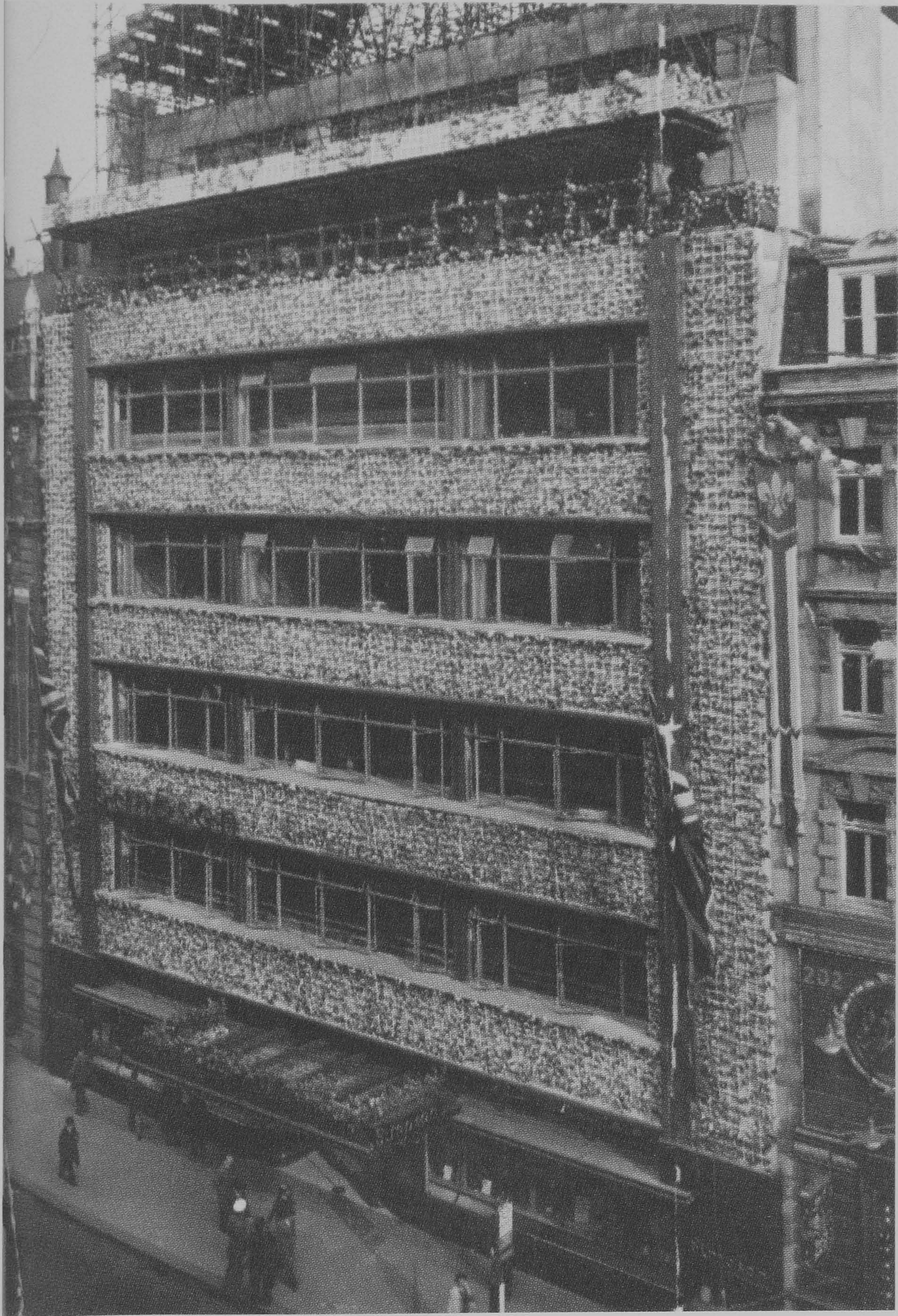


Figure 11.3 Simpsons decorated with a trellis of flowers for the Coronation, 1937, Simpsons Archive





Figure 11.4 John Lewis's decorative banner celebrating the Coronation stretched over Holles Street, 1937. John Lewis Partnership Archive, 421/4b.





Figure 11.5 Coronation decorations at Swears and Wells, 1937, National Monuments Record



A PORTFOLIO OF  
SELFRIDGE'S DECORATIONS  
FOR THE  
CORONATION

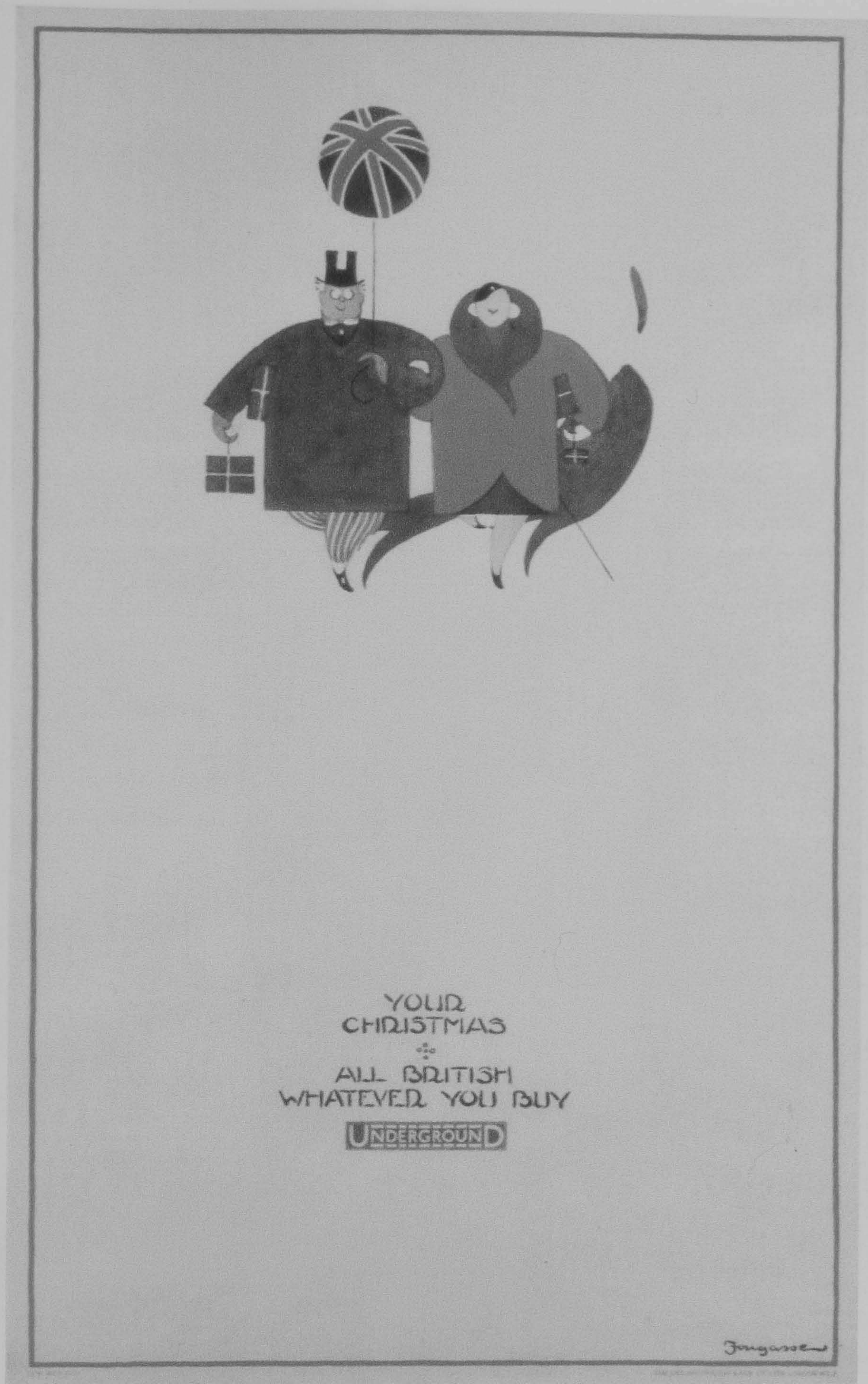


MAY 1937

PRICE ONE SHILLING

Figure 11.6 A Portfolio of Selfridge's Decorations for the Coronation, May 1937, National Monuments Record.





YOUR  
CHRISTMAS  
❖  
ALL BRITISH  
WHATEVER YOU BUY  
**UNDERGROUND**

Jongens

Figure 11.7 London Underground poster, 1931, London Transport Museum



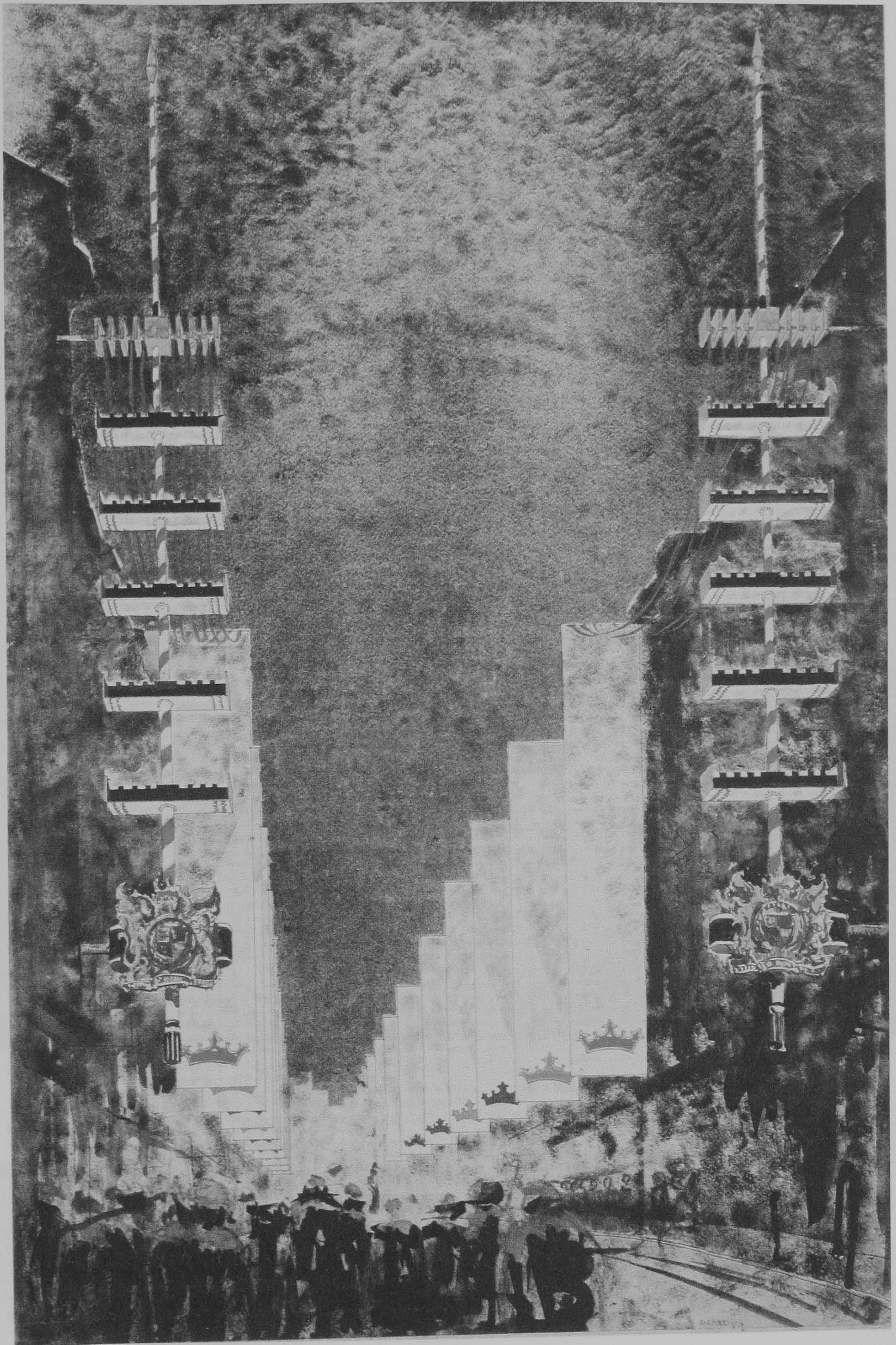


Figure 11.8 Anne Acland's designs for Coronation decorations in Bond Street, 1937, RIBA Drawings Collection.





Figure 11.9 Erection of Oxford Street Coronation decorations, 1937, John Lewis Partnership Archive, 2397/e.



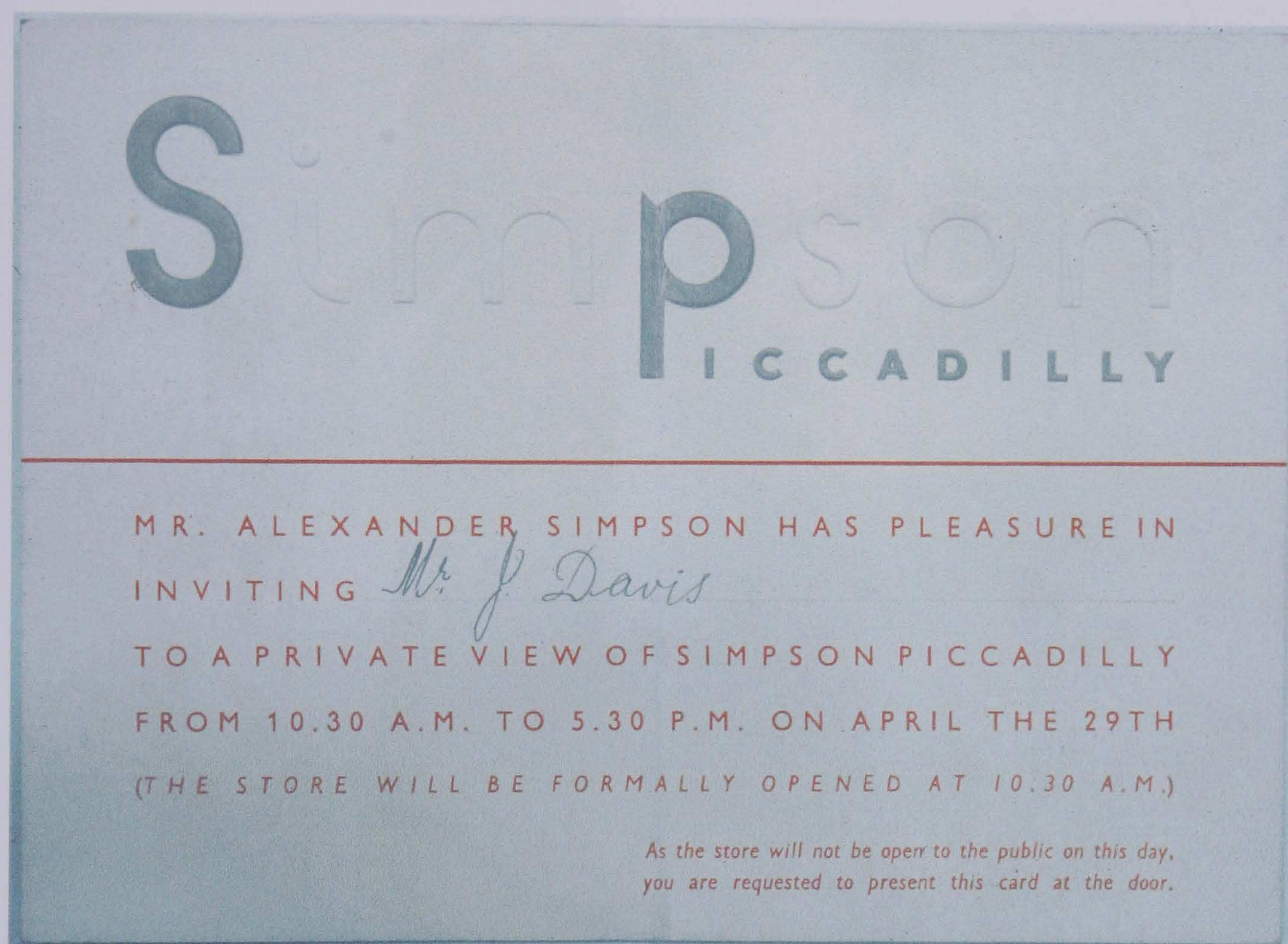


Figure 11.10 Invitation to the private view of Simpsons, Simpsons Archive.

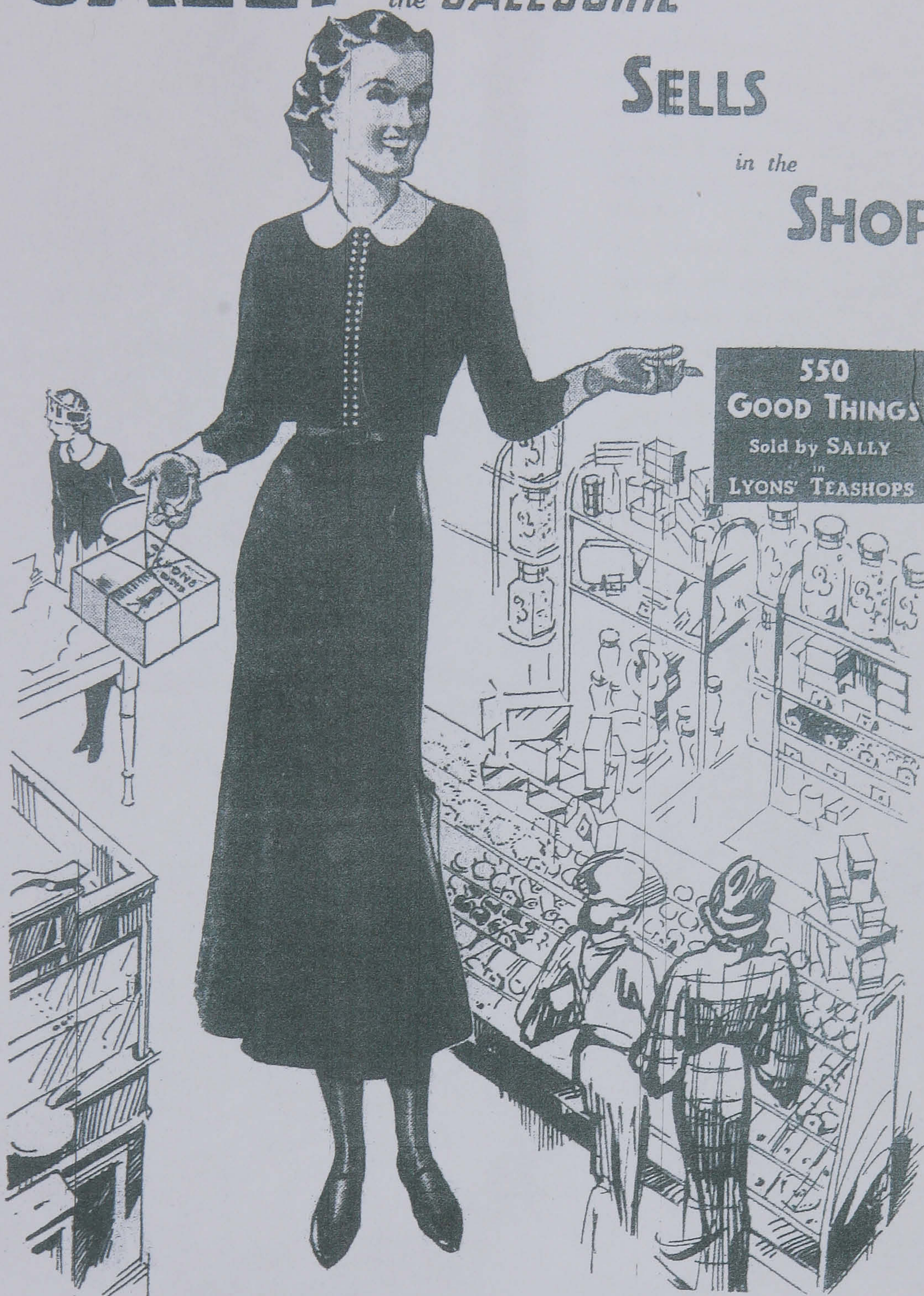


**SALLY** *the SALESGIRL*

**SELLS**

*in the*

**SHOP**




**LYONS' TEASHOPS**

J. Lyons & Co., Ltd., Cadby Hall, London, W.1

Figure 12.1 Advertisement for Lyons' Teashops, *Daily Mail*, 23 April 1936, 14.





A rising architect . . .  
yes . . . but what a pity  
he doesn't get his  
clothes at . . .

**Simpson**  
PICCADILLY

The Daks 2-piece suit is just the sort of idea you'd expect from Simpson's! Smart enough for the office, easy enough for country and week-end wear—it has been specially designed for coolness and comfort in hot weather. As its name implies, it has no waistcoat—yet, even with the jacket removed, you still look neat and trim. For the trousers are Daks! Cut to fit snugly to your hips, they keep up perfectly without belt or braces; while a simple device keeps your shirt down. The whole suit, in fact—tailored in superb materials—has Daks comfort-in-action and perfect hang . . . Prices from 4 guineas — and selling, we need hardly say, like hot cakes.

SIMPSON 202 PICCADILLY, TELEPHONE REGENT 2002 (FREE CAR PARKING FACILITIES)  
(THERE IS AN AGENT FOR SIMPSON TAILORING IN YOUR DISTRICT)

Figure 12.2 Simpsons Advertisement, *Daily Telegraph* 6 April 1938.



# Men about Town

LOOK  
WHAT YOU GET  
AT  
SIMPSON'S



In case anyone should still think that formal-ish town clothes leave a man little chance for self-expression, Simpson, Piccadilly, advance the accompanying enlightened thoughts. Above left, you observe a double-breasted suit in blue-grey worsted flannel with a white line. It is worn here—and a good idea too, we think—with a rough bowler hat which Simpsons have in a special summer light-weight. (The suit costs £5, 12. 6. The hat is 25/-)



The gentleman with the cigar seems about to make a note of something. While he's doing it, let us make a note of him. First, the dark blue homburg hat (30/-). Next, his grey-blue pinhead suit in clean-cut worsted (8 guineas). In place of the waistcoat, he is wearing, as is fashionable now, a differently coloured vest. The latter is in a blue and white West of England saxon. What you can't see is that the vest is backless. Cool in summer! 2 gns

Figure 13.1 Simpsons advertisement, *Evening News*, 13 May 1936.





## IN TOWN TODAY...!

The 'man-about-town' air of this particularly smart suit is accentuated by the clean-cut worsted from which it has been tailored. It is made to the younger man's figure. That is to say, the shoulders, a touch wider than usual, have a little extra swagger; the sleeves are a little narrower; the whole jacket is amply cut in the chest, and slim in the hips. Prices vary according to material — you will be agreeably surprised to find them so moderate.

**Simpson**  
PICCADILLY

TOWN SUITS · SPORTS CLOTHES · DRESS CLOTHES  
FLANNELS · OVERCOATS · RAINCOATS

**THERE IS AN AGENT FOR SIMPSON TAILORING IN YOUR DISTRICT**

Simpson Piccadilly (202 Piccadilly, W.1) will be pleased to give you his name

Figure 13.2 Simpsons advertisement, *Punch*, 6 May 1936.





A vintage advertisement for Simpson's, featuring a man in a tuxedo and a shopping bag. The man is holding a top hat and a shopping bag with the Simpson's logo. The background is a light blue color. The text 'Ascot' is written vertically on the left side. The text 'Simpson's' is written on the shopping bag. The text 'SIMPSON 302 PICCADILLY, REGENT 2002' is at the bottom left.

# Ascot

In the height of the season, and with this democratic city of ours becoming more formal every minute—Simpsons dedicate this advertisement to Royal Ascot, and the appropriate clothes therefor • The distinguished personage on the right shows you fairly clearly what such clothes should be. Permissible variations are a double collar instead of the wide-winged one, and some men prefer notched lapels to double breasted. Also, as we show on the left, there are a number of variations allowed to you in the choice of materials • To enable us to do our best for you, it would be a good thing if you came in about your Ascot clothes as soon as possible now. Here are some prices, which vary of course with material: Black coat from 5 guineas. Striped trousers, 35/-. Grey waistcoat, 25/-. Grey top hat, 2 guineas. The pull-on chamois gloves, slightly unconventional, 12/6

Simpson  
PICCADILLY

SIMPSON 302 PICCADILLY, REGENT 2002

Figure 13.3 Simpsons advertisement, *The Bystander*, 10 June 1936.





**Now in 41 colours and 8 materials**

Keep up-to-date with your collection! Ask for the 1938 Daks Colour Chart showing the whole range in full colour. All Daks 30/-. Daks Shorts 21/-. From all good men's shops, or write Simpson, 202, Piccadilly, London.

**DAKS**

Figure 13.4 Simpsons advertisement, *Punch*, 18 May 1938.



**A man of 30 chooses the Piccadilly**

The wide, generous shoulders and shaped waist make a man look tall, slim and broad shouldered.

**5 guineas.**

---

**When a man's 40 he chooses the Carlton**

The Carlton's not shaped at the waist so much as the Piccadilly . . . hides a man's bulge if he's beginning to bulge.

**6 guineas.**

---

**But when he's 60 he prefers the Harvey**

Conservative cut, a quiet appearance and a big inner pocket for stethoscope or briefs make this coat popular with professional men of all ages as well as with the older business men.

**7 guineas.**

**Simpson**  
PICCADILLY  
REGENT 2002

Figure 13.5 *Evening News*, 19 October 1937.



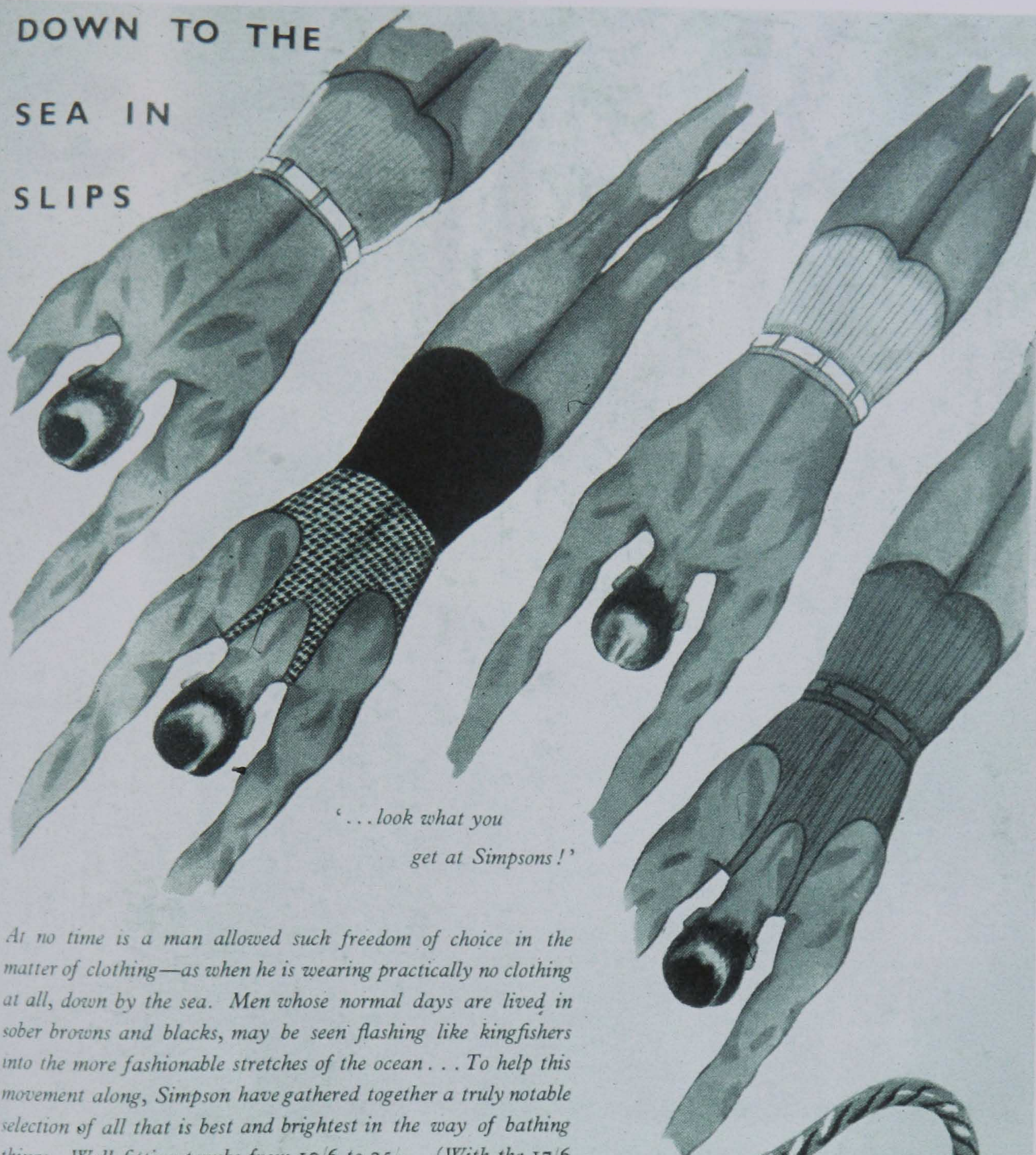
# 'untin'-fishin'-shootin'



Figure 13.6 Simpsons advertisement, *Canadian Pacific Gazette* and *Ocean Times*, July 1936.



# DOWN TO THE SEA IN SLIPS



'...look what you  
get at Simpsons!'

At no time is a man allowed such freedom of choice in the matter of clothing—as when he is wearing practically no clothing at all, down by the sea. Men whose normal days are lived in sober browns and blacks, may be seen flashing like kingfishers into the more fashionable stretches of the ocean... To help this movement along, Simpson have gathered together a truly notable selection of all that is best and brightest in the way of bathing things. Well-fitting trunks from 10/6 to 25/-. (With the 17/6 pairs you can have a matching or contrasting top for another 17/6.) Full bathing suits (in any number of colours)... but come in and see them all! And N.B.—don't forget that nothing is more uncomfortable in the world than putting on a wet costume. Take two! Then one will always be dry!



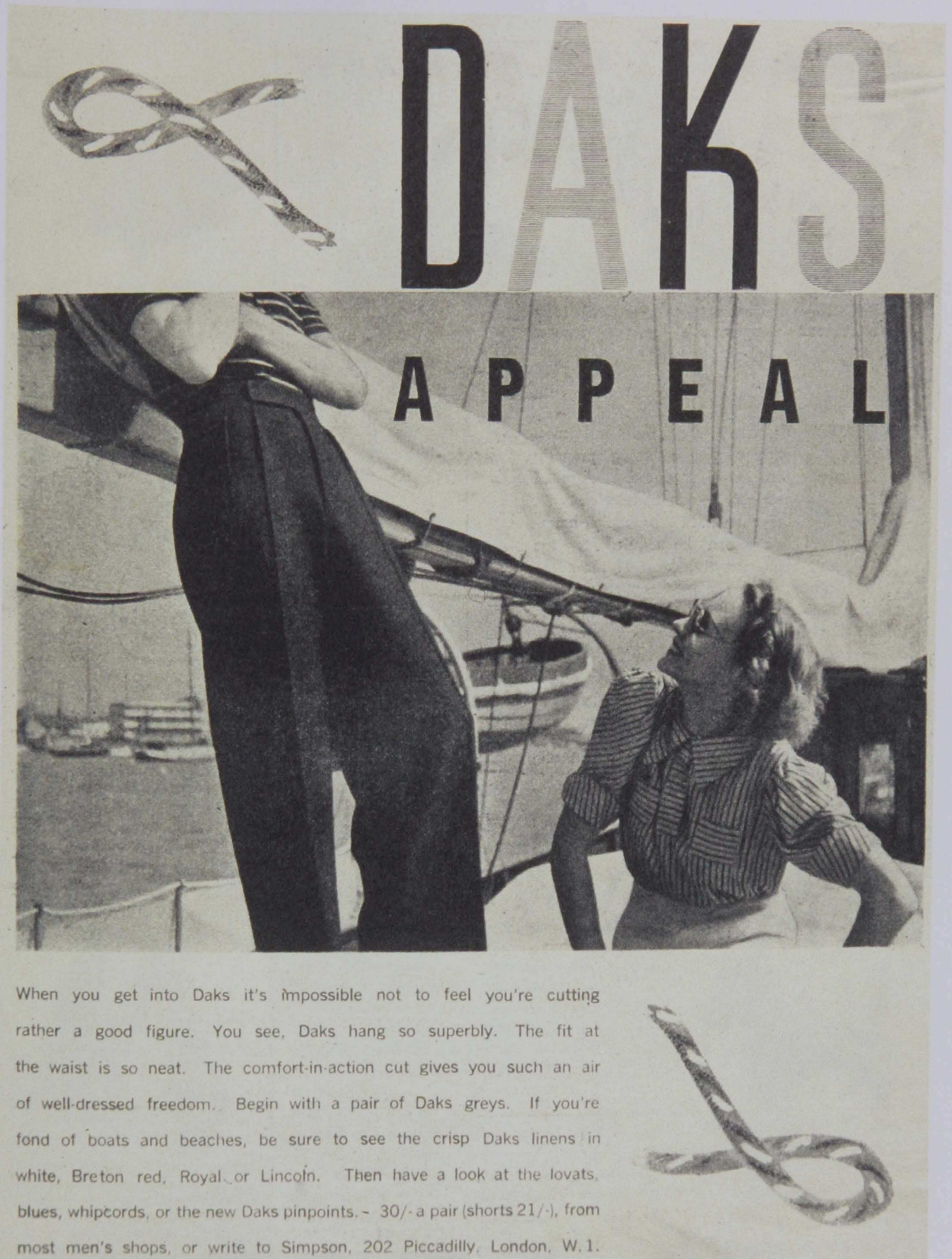
It is well worth while paying a visit to our Boat Exhibition on the 5th floor. You will find there speedboats, outboards, sailing dinghies, collapsible boats and all manner of small craft.



SIMPSON 202 PICCADILLY, REGENT 2002

Figure 13.7 Simpsons Advertisement, *The Evening News*, 9 July 1936.





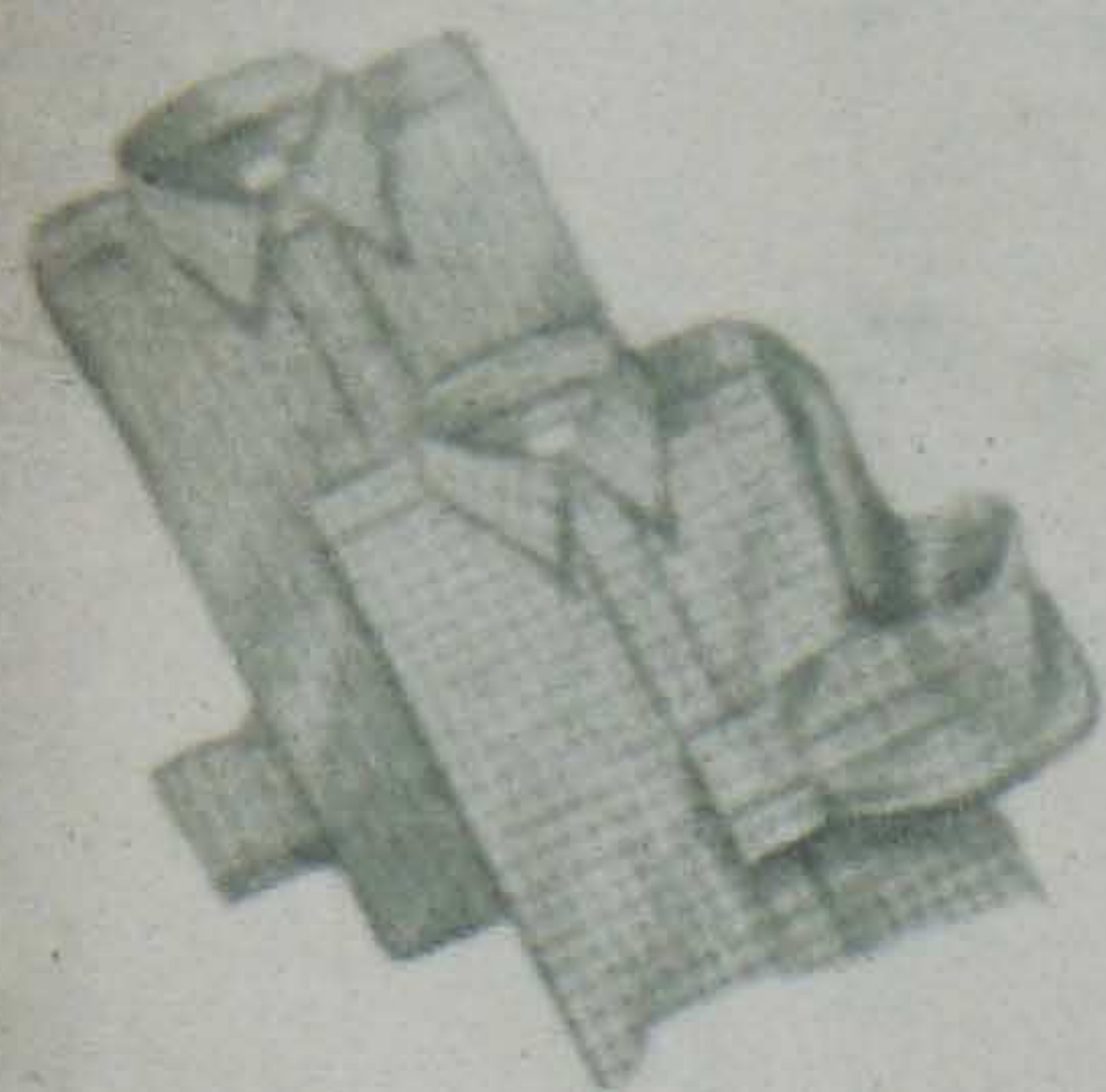
# D AKS

## A P P E A L

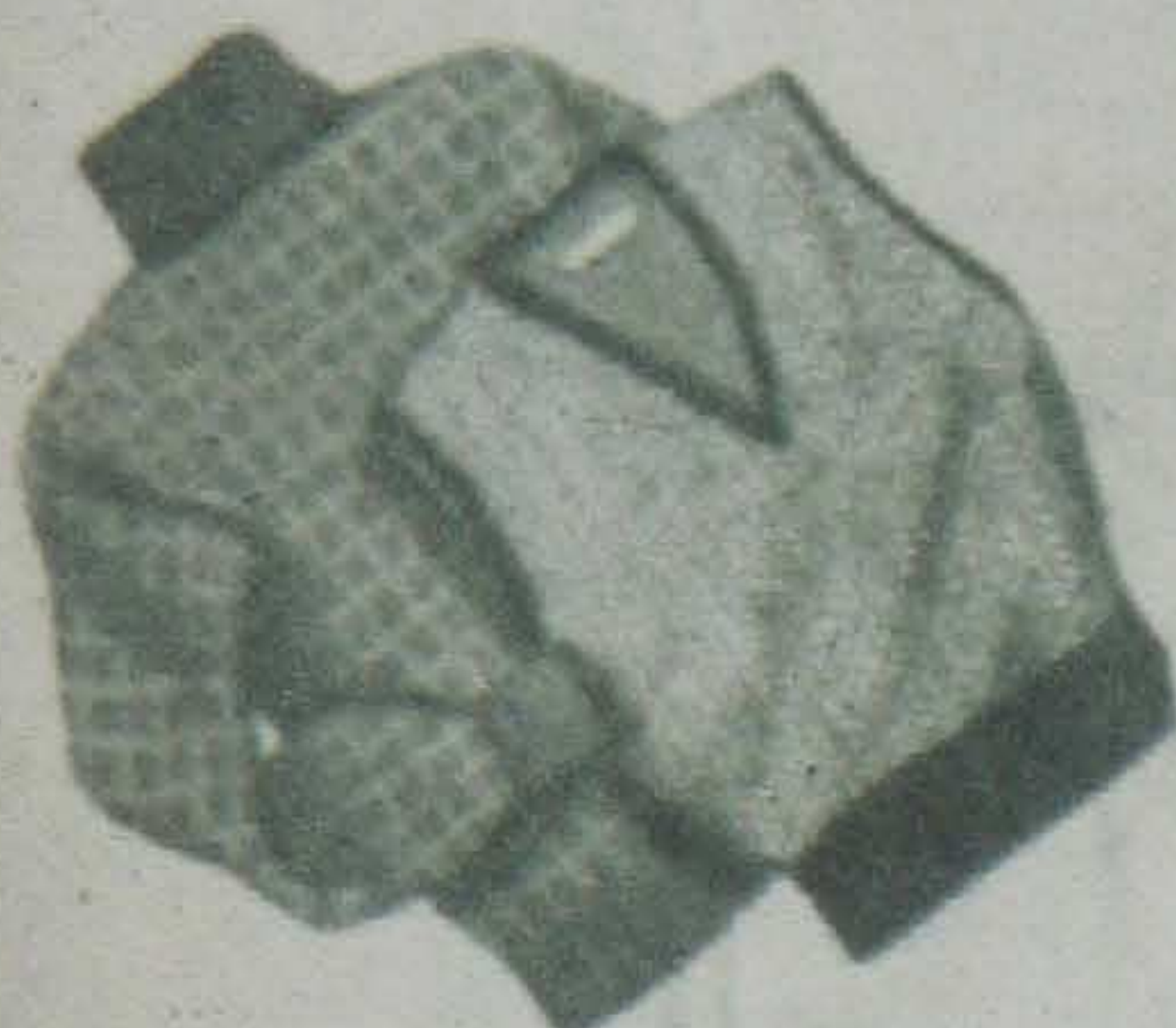
When you get into Daks it's impossible not to feel you're cutting rather a good figure. You see, Daks hang so superbly. The fit at the waist is so neat. The comfort-in-action cut gives you such an air of well-dressed freedom. Begin with a pair of Daks greys. If you're fond of boats and beaches, be sure to see the crisp Daks linens in white, Breton red, Royal, or Lincoln. Then have a look at the lovals, blues, whiptords, or the new Daks pinpoints. - 30/- a pair (shorts 21/-), from most men's shops, or write to Simpson, 202 Piccadilly, London, W.1.

Figure 13.8 Simpsons Advertisement, Punch, 11 May 1938.





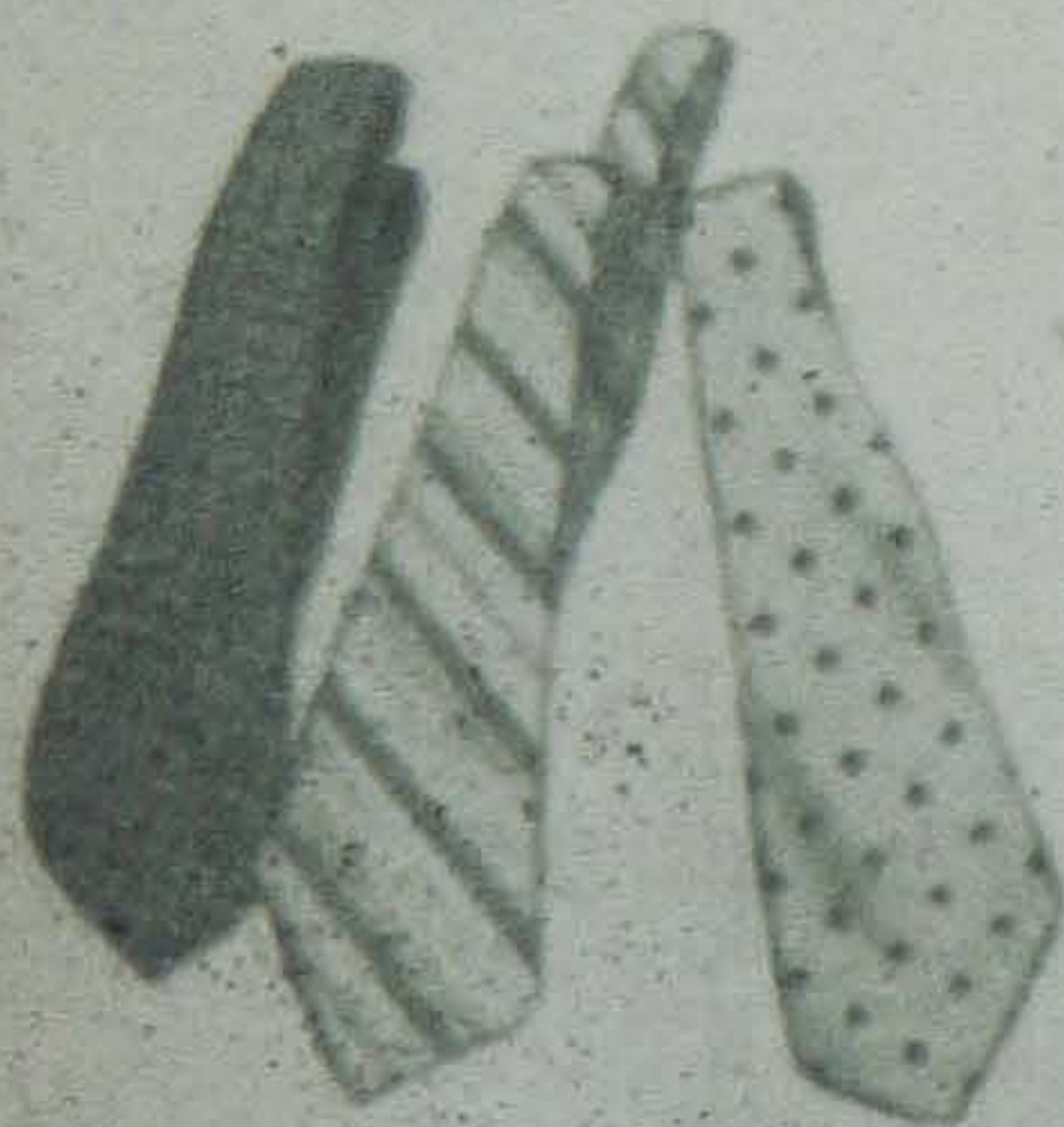
Two of the vast array of sports shirts at Simpson's. One in fine-quality wool at 30/- The other, in a new cloth woven specially for lightness, 17/6.



Likewise, two pullovers. The high-neck polo sweater is in fine botany wool and costs 32/6. The sleeveless pullover with its two-tone herringbone design, is in alpaca 25/-



The monk shoe, as we said the other day, is definitely 'as worn' now. It won through on comfort. This pair is in brown willow calf, hand-wheeled and lasted, leather-lined throughout, and costs 63/-



These ties taken from Simpson's immense selection. One, a fancy design in silk, cut from the square, is priced at 6/6. Another is a silk and angora, large size, made in one piece, at 10/6. The third, a fancy printed cashmere, costs 2/6.

## What's on for Week-ends



In case you are wondering what the above smiles are about, we may say that they were entirely prompted by the pleasant thought that Summer is nearly here, and the fact that life in general seems pretty good. You might at the same time cast an eye at the various articles of clothing which accompany all this light-heartedness.

- The double-breasted suit, with lapel rolling to lower button, is in striped worsted. Its price is £6.12.6. It is worn here with a fine white poplin shirt and stiff collar (17/6) and a foulard tie, 4/6. The shoes are brown willow calf Oxfords with light flexible sole and stitched cap, 35/- The hat tucked away under the bar is a soft grey homburg, at 25/-

- The clothes worn by the other cheerful spirit read downwards something like this: Plain twill shirt with collar attached, 12/6. Spotted tie, 4/6. Sports jacket in glen-urquhart check, £3.3.0. A pair of Daks, 30/-, of course. Finally, a pair of whole-cut shoes made in reverse calf on the veldtschoen principle, with moulded rubber soles, £2.2.0.

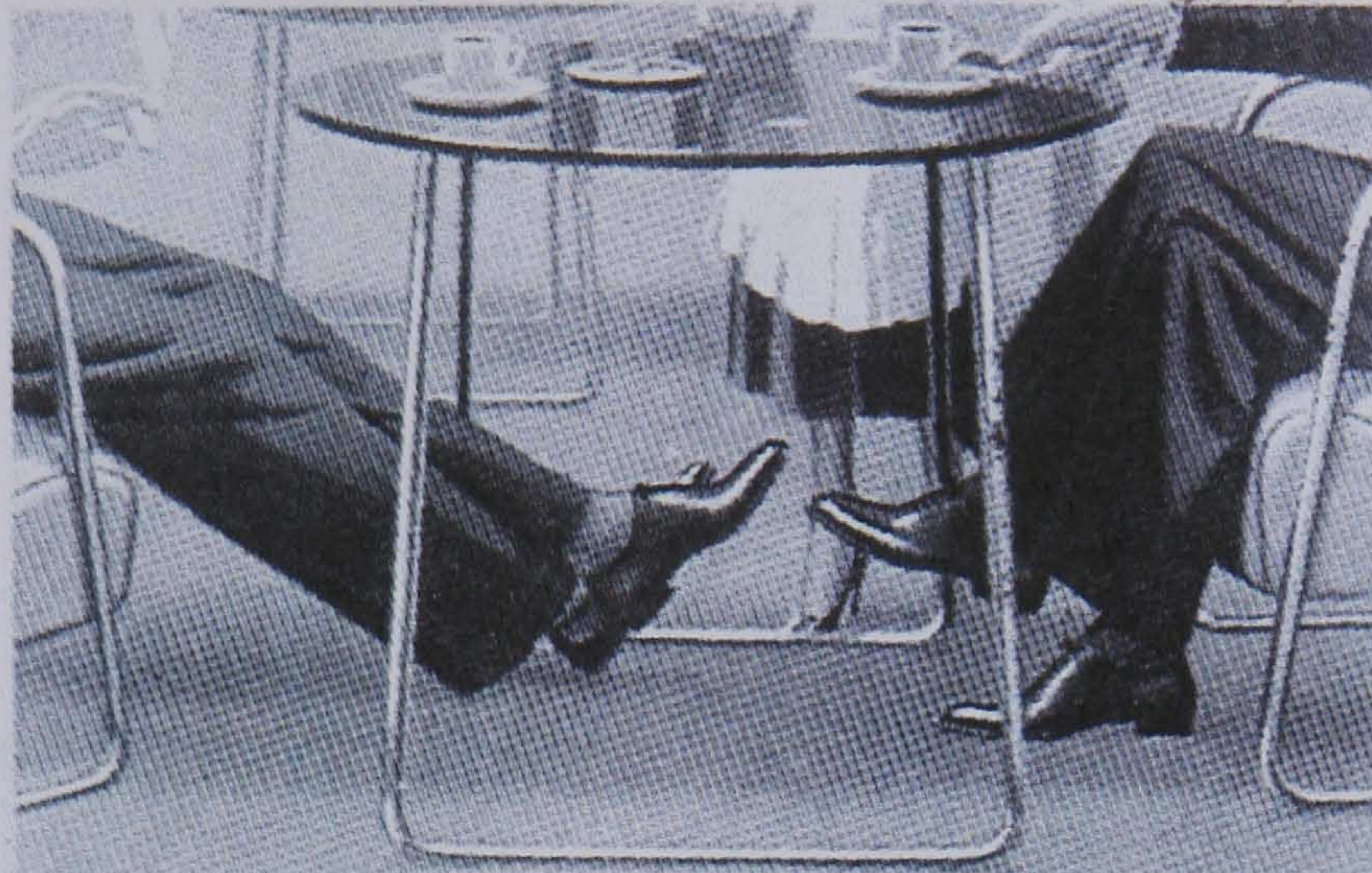


We can't think of any reason for the Scottie getting in here—unless it is to remind you of the distinguished pedigree pups in the dog shop, price 5 and 6 guineas.

SIMPSON 292 PICCADILLY, REGENT 2002 (THERE IS AN AGENT FOR SIMPSON TAILORING IN YOUR DISTRICT)

Figure 13.9 Advertisement for Simpsons, *Daily Telegraph*, 3 June 1936, 6





## *Across the Morning Coffee*

..... but he always was very awkward to handle.

It's a funny thing how some men  
will not listen to expert advice .....

Even in quite small matters .....

I find as a rule it pays to allow  
that the other fellow knows his job .....

I remember  
when I bought this pair of shoes I'm wearing,  
my shoeman told me they'd last much longer  
because they fitted so perfectly.

I liked the shoes  
but I thought the price was rather a lot.  
And I couldn't see how his argument worked out.

But it does—  
for I've never had a pair of shoes  
to fit like them ;  
and I'm beginning to think  
they'll go on wearing for ever.

*Men never gossip!*

But you hear some interesting things  
when the talk turns on

# LOTUS shoes

Ask to be fitted from  
The New DELTA Guinea Range

LOTUS LTD., STAFFORD & NORTHAMPTON

Figure 13.10 Advertisement for Lotus Shoes reproduced in *Commercial Art*, October 1935, 134



Sorry I'm late—but look what I got at Simpsons!



Figure 13.11 Simpsons advertisement, *The Tatler*, 12 August 1936.



# telling TAILS

The evening tail-coat might well be included in the armorial bearings of England. It is not only a perfect symbol of the Englishman's far-famed formality—it exactly represents that something extra by which the Englishman sets the fashion for the world in the matter of clothes.

The average American is formal when he has put on 'tuxedo'—the Continental is formal when he has donned 'the smoking' (sometimes under the impression that he is being very English). But the Englishman is only formal when he has decided that the dinner jacket is not formal enough. He wins—if not by a short head—at least by his tails!

It is not surprising, therefore, that the cutting of an evening tail-coat is held by Simpsons to be a very precise exercise in the tailoring art. This item of masculine adornment, furthermore, admits of few or no variations upon its formal theme of design. The dinner-jacket may be single- or double-breasted. The

**Simpson**  
PICCADILLY



lounge suit offers its prospective owner an orgy of alternatives in cut and cloth. But the evening tail-coat displays its perfection in a masterly unobtrusiveness.

Above all, for the tailor, it must constitute a triumph of mind over material. Its tails—reaching to beyond the knees—must hold close to the figure with nothing but invisible cunning to hold them there. Its sleeves must be narrow and yet accommodate the width of starched cuffs. Its front—which cannot be buttoned—must yet sit as snugly to the breast as though it *were* buttoned. With the elbow lifted—as in dancing or other sport—it must not reveal the

base-line of the waistcoat, though in normal position this must be only just covered. The curve of its lapels must suggest—even if unsupported by—the bold contour of a manly bosom.

Behold, then, the English gentleman, attired by Simpsons for Ritz or Carlton, and you will have seen English formal wear at its best. Should you wish to be the central figure in this transformation scene, you have only to place yourself in the hands of Simpson, Piccadilly.

You will find these headquarters of authentic English clothes just a few yards away from Piccadilly Circus.

Figure 13.12 Simpsons Advertisement, *L'Atlantique*, (SS Normandie) 22 August 1936.



WHETHER YOU'RE BUILT like this ... or this ...

... WE CAN FIT YOU PERFECTLY IN A SMART READY TO WEAR SUIT TAILORED BY SIMPSON

6 GNS

**Simpson**  
VICCADILLY  
REGENT 2002

FREE CAR PARKING FACILITIES

In addition to the regular menu of plats du jour, grills and croutes we have a large menu devoted entirely to crisp, cool salads and delicious sandwiches. And the Simpson restaurant is more popular than ever!

Figure 13.13 Simpsons Advertisement, *Evening Standard*, 20 September 1937.



This is our most popular all purpose over-coat . . . burly enough for an open car but restrained enough for Piccadilly. You can choose it ready-made in any one of seven materials, each the best of its kind.

*You can choose this coat in . . .*

- Scotch Ulstering 6 gns
- Scotch Curl 7 gns
- blended Cheviot and Saxony 8 gns
- Camel and Cashmere mixture 10 gns
- pure Camel hair 12 gns
- pure Cashmere Curl 14 gns

**Simpson**  
PICCADILLY

FREE CAR PARKING FACILITIES

Figure 13.14 Simpsons advertisement, *Evening News*, 1 November 1937.





Figure 14.1, Front cover of *Vogue*, 2 September 1936..





ALEXANDER

FERNDEN SPORTS

# PORTFOLIO

of smart fashions for limited incomes

- Look round you at your next week-end party, at your resort holiday—you'll find your eye resting with satisfaction on a girl in a white linen suit, strictly tailored, immaculate. Nothing so well defeats the forces of heat, dust and general limpness. And if her accessories are navy blue, so much the better. This to introduce our bargain of the fortnight, excellently tailored to measure for 6½ guineas, with short-sleeved navy jersey shirt, 22s. 6d.; Fernden Sports
- Other aspects of the summer scene are to be found in the following pages—holiday clothes that live on into autumn; discussions of food, exercises for beauty and knitting

Figure 14.2

Figure 14.2 *Vogue*, 1930, 61.





*"The new Vogue, please"*  
*"It's two shillings, miss"*  
*"I know, but it'll be worth it!"\**

\* Many extra pages, special features, more colour in Vogue's Spring Double Number. And 6d. extra on the price—2/- for advance news of the whole Spring mode! Study the mode early—and you'll buy the mode wisely, wear the mode well. Plan now—and you'll get full value from every penny you spend, real chic from every frock you buy, or make. No expensive last-minute purchases! No costly failures! Here are many times two shillings saved.

## VOGUE SPRING FORECAST NUMBER VOGUE SPRING PATTERN BOOK

On Sale January 22. Both together **2/-**

Figure 14.3 Advertisement, *Vogue*, 8 January 1936.





Figure 14.4 *Vogue*, 19 February 1936, 89



ONE GLORIOUS CERTAINTY

Is it fashionable?

Will it go with my new coat?

Will we like it?

Will it wash? - **YES!**

—says this  
Lux Washability  
Certificate



**N**O MORE RISK of your most precious creation returning from the wash a faded ghost of its former gay self. Even before you buy the fabric, you can now make quite certain it will wash. All you have to do is to ask to see the Lux Washability Certificate.

This Certificate lays the whole story before you. Here is the fabric — new. Here it is again after it has been washed six times in Lux. You can see, with your own eyes, exactly how it will look after frequent washings.

Yet fabrics guaranteed by these Certificates cost not a penny more

than others. And there are such hundreds of them to choose from — all the last word in fashion — that you can satisfy your most capricious fancy amongst their colours and designs.

If the fabric of your choice requires any special care in washing you will find full instructions on the Certificate. If no special hints are given, just wash in Lux in the usual way. Lux will keep your precious frocks lovely longer than you would think possible. Try it. It is easy to use and won't harm the most subtle colours or the flimsiest fabrics.

Washing Test		
Carried out in the Washing Test Laboratory		
of LEVER BROTHERS LIMITED, Port Sunlight		
Reference	Material	Tested for
		No. 12345
Original Sample Unwashed	Washed once in WATER ONLY	Washed 6 times in LUX
<b>Report of Washing Test Laboratory:</b> Fastness to washing ..... Shrinkage of Warp (Length) ..... Shrinkage of Weft (Width) ..... Any fabric can be ruined by improper laundering. To prove conclusively that this material is washable show this card		

#### NOW ABOUT STOCKINGS AND UNDIES

When you buy lovely underwear and sheer stockings, look at the cards attached telling you how to wash them. You can have perfect confidence in these simple instructions. They are prepared for manufacturers by the Lux Washability Bureau, Lever Brothers Limited, Port Sunlight, Cheshire.



If it's safe in water it's safe in **LUX** —

LX 1873-109

A LEVER PRODUCT

Figure 14.5 Advertisement for 'Lux', *Vogue* 20 March 1935, 32.



Selfridges, which means all things to all people, means especially to us, at this moment, sweets. Its sweet department is among its chiefest glories and we are all sweet connoisseurs nowadays, and like to nibble—experimentally, critically and greedily. The thoughtful week-end guest stows a box of sweets in his suitcase; the thoughtful hostess leaves others about, invitingly. The shopper seen here, wandering fascinated among the gay packages, wears a brown and natural colour double-breasted tweed coat with a belt at the back only and a brown velvet collar. The detachable cape, fitted snugly to the shoulders, swings hip-length. 8½ guineas. The brown velour hat with creased crown has a brim turned up at the back and projecting in front. 2½ guineas. Selfridges

### Sweet shopping at Selfridges



Figure 14.6 *Vogue*, 18 September 1935, 79.





EVERY year Vogue joins that large band of those who warn all the others to do their Christmas shopping early. And every year Vogue tries to practise what it preaches by shopping first and promptly setting before you the fruits of its labours. But this year we've bent backwards in order to preach our moral with a clear conscience. What we've staged is not merely a preliminary shopping skirmish—it's a major manœuvre in which we've captured a hundred of the best Christmas gift selections to be had in the whole of London. A rash statement, you think? Well turn to pages 73 to 81 and you'll see the proof. Turn your eyes left and above and you see a picture of yourself and your fellow readers early to-morrow morning. Before the shops have fairly opened their doors we wager you'll be hot foot on the trail of the things you like best among Vogue's hundred gift selections. Since it's open season for gifts, we set the ball rolling again by also offering you a gift—a lovely new scent that shall be nameless until you, our good readers, elect to christen it. So, even though we had to tack on an extra sixpence and bring the price up to 2s. for this "de luxe" double number, we know you'll agree that it has been well worth it.

Figure 14.7 *Vogue*, 13 November 1935, 53.



# BUYING is a woman's occupation!

Make the Woman's Magazine  
your Shop Window.



The close bond of Editorial interest which exists between the " Woman's Magazine " and its readers is translated to the advertisement pages by a publishers' guarantee for advertisements published. Advertising in the Woman's Magazine means maximum result for minimum expenditure, a wide circle of interested readers, and sound editorial support. Your advertisement in the Woman's Magazine reaches the " chief buyer " in the home. Once an advertiser—always an advertiser in

## The Woman's Magazine

Figure 14.8 Advertisement for advertising space in the *Woman's Magazine*, *Commercial Art*, November 1931, p.IV.



# For the first time - a real SHOPPING NEWSPAPER LONDON SHOPPING NEWS

FIRST ISSUE SEPTEMBER 25th, 1937

A First-Class Advertising Medium for Retail Stores, Shops, Etc.



If it's in the "London Shopping News" it's the best value in Town

## FEATURES

- A 12 page publication very attractively produced in **PHOTOGRAVURE**, size  $14\frac{3}{4}'' \times 10''$
- Circulation of **100,000** weekly guaranteed **POSTED GRATIS** to first-class homes in London and suburbs
- LONDON SHOPPING NEWS is posted, in a smart wrapper, every Friday night for delivery Saturday morning
- NEWS PHOTOS - ADVANCE FASHIONS BEAUTY HINTS - FILM NOTES - WEEKLY HOROSCOPE - ETC. - to stimulate the women readers' interest
- **No wastage in circulation**  
Direct contact is established with the Shopper. **Low Advertising Rates**

FOR FULL DETAILS - DUMMY COPIES, RATE CARD, APPLY TO THE PUBLISHERS "LONDON SHOPPING NEWS"

**LONDON & PROVINCIAL SHOPPING NEWSPAPERS LTD.**  
45 ST. JAMES'S PLACE, LONDON, S.W.1

Telephone REGent 4508

Figure 14.9 Advertisement for *London Shopping News* in *Store*, September 1937, 3.





Figure 14.10 Front cover by Bolin, *Vogue*, 22  
January 1930.



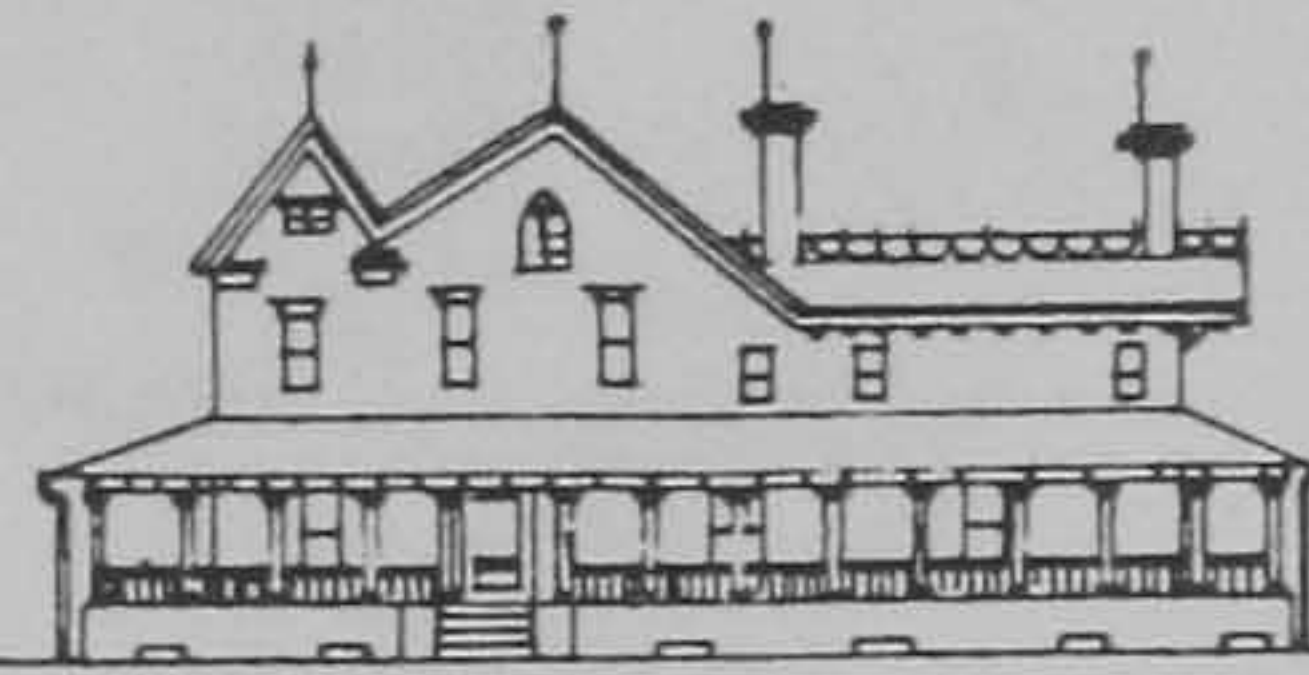
# THE CONSUMER — HER HOME



1900

WOMEN are  
the world's shoppers  
but  
not this woman,

1900



The goods which  
they buy are used  
to furnish a house,  
but  
this house  
has been



1910

nor this,

1905

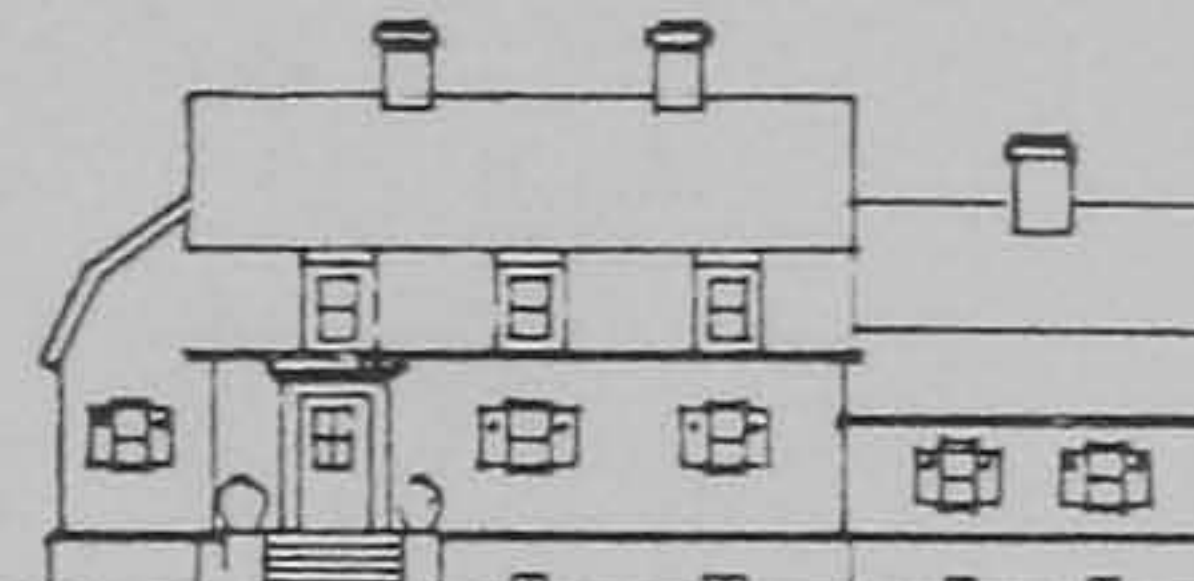


1910



gradually

1915



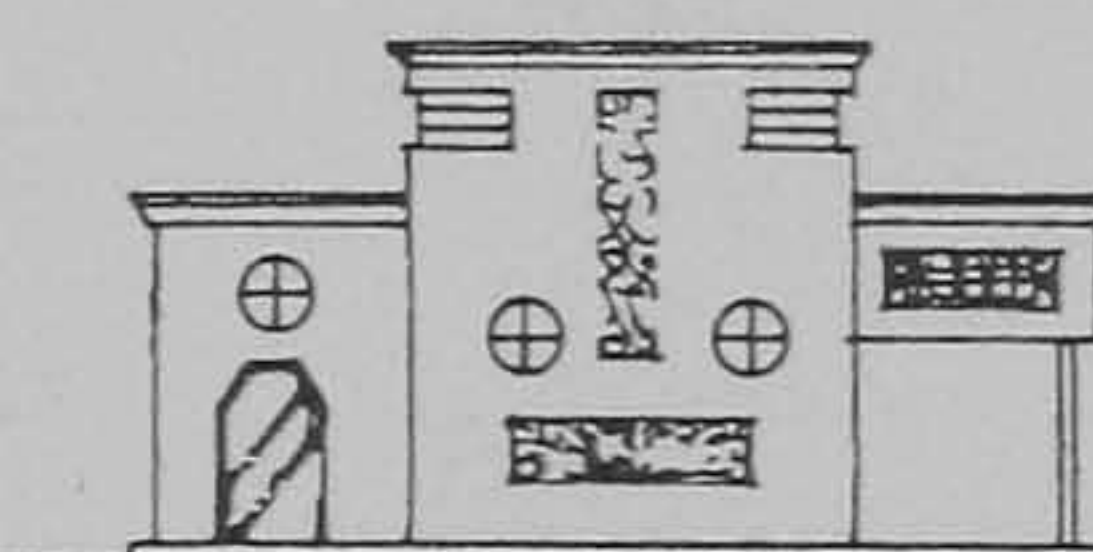
1920



1925

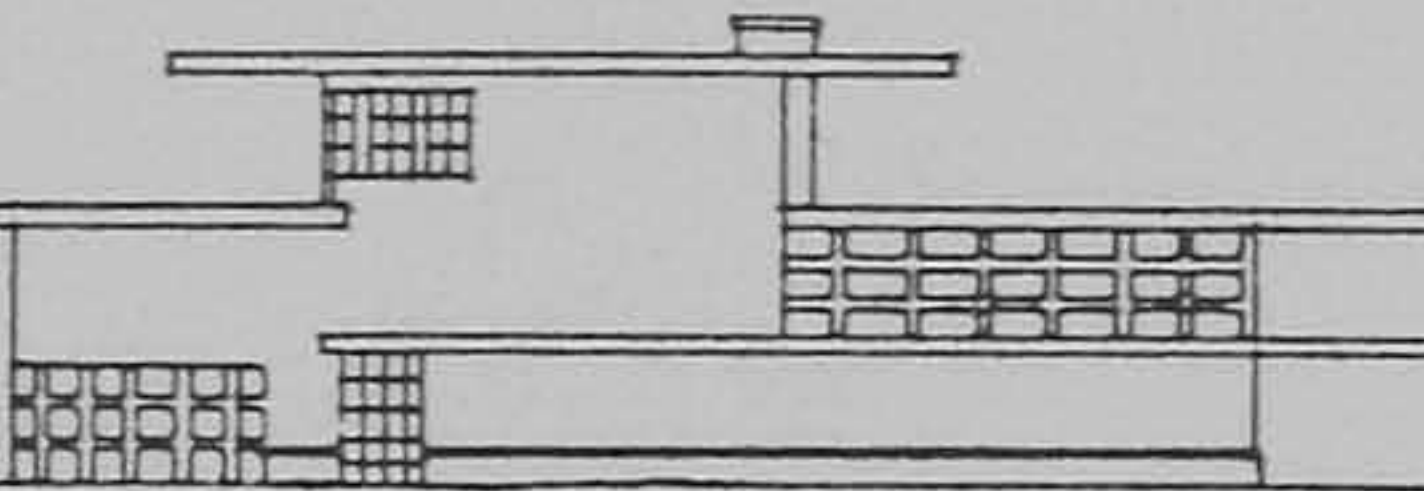
nor this,

1925



simplified,

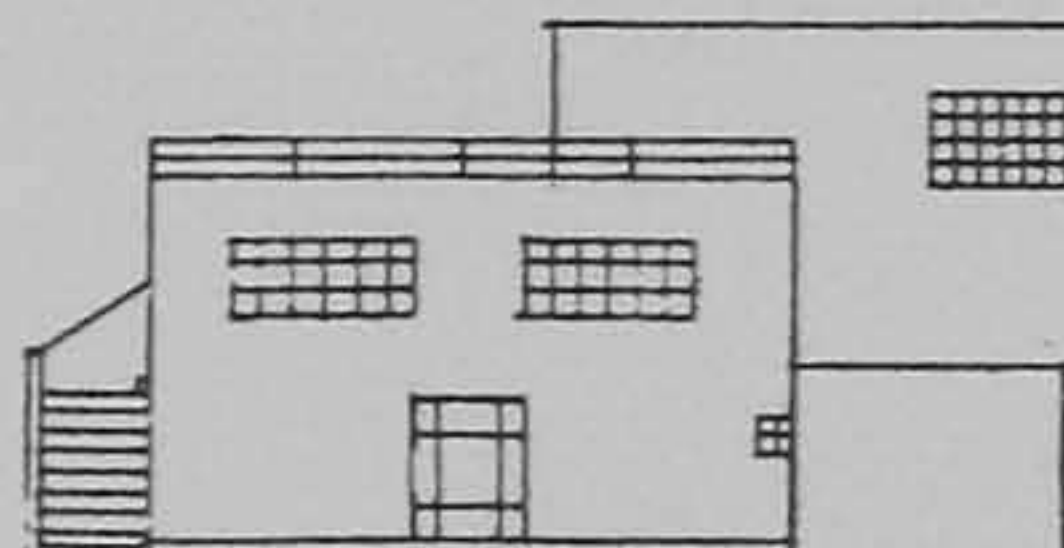
1928



1934

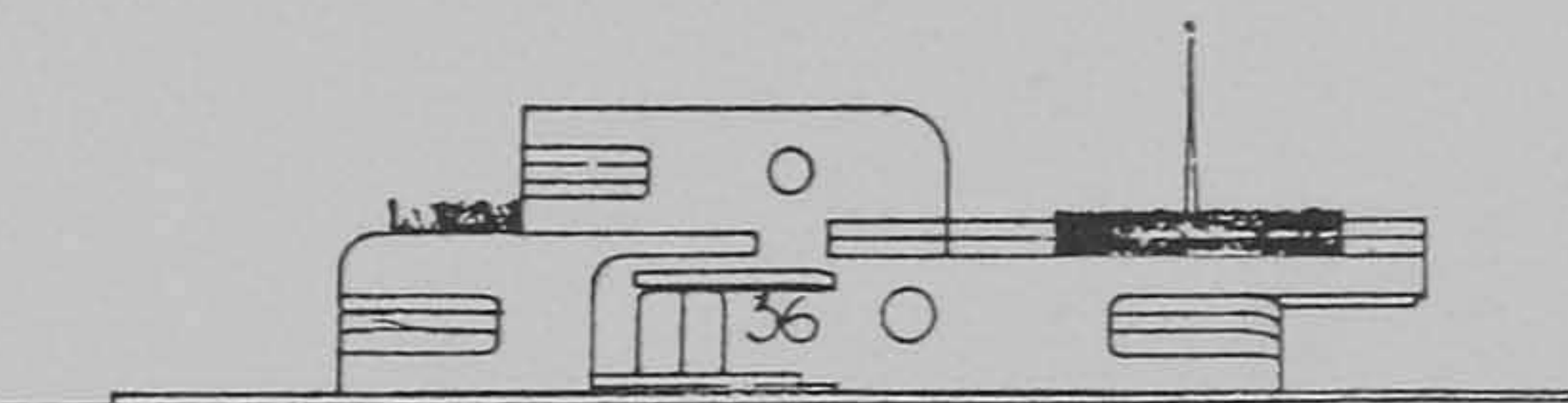
nor this.

1933



and streamlined.

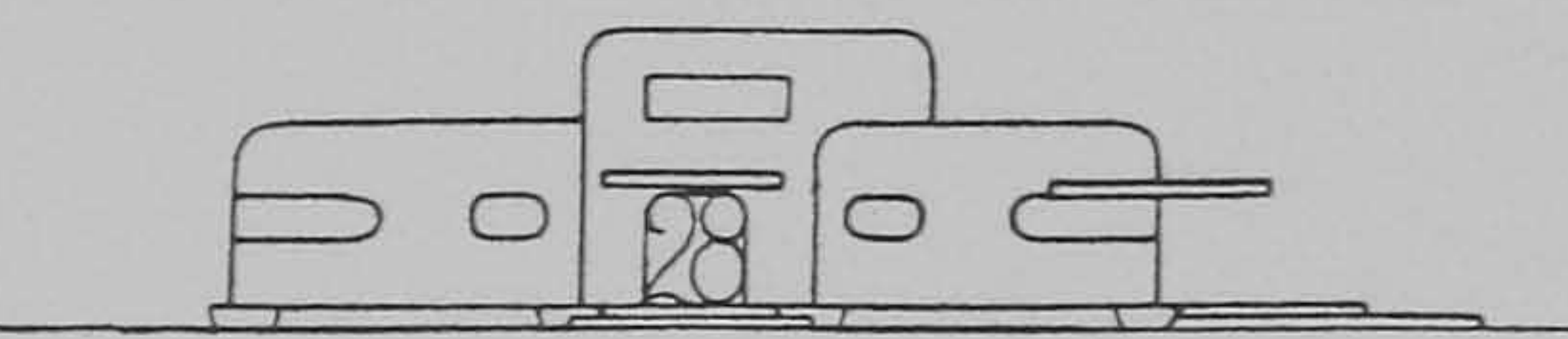
The buyer of  
tomorrow is  
*this* woman.



The house of  
tomorrow will  
soon be here.



Are your goods  
designed to  
satisfy her taste?



Are your goods  
designed to  
fit *this* house?

## DESIGN MOVES ON—

Figure 14.11 'Design Moves On - Are you keeping up?' *Commercial Art and Industry* May 1935, 196.



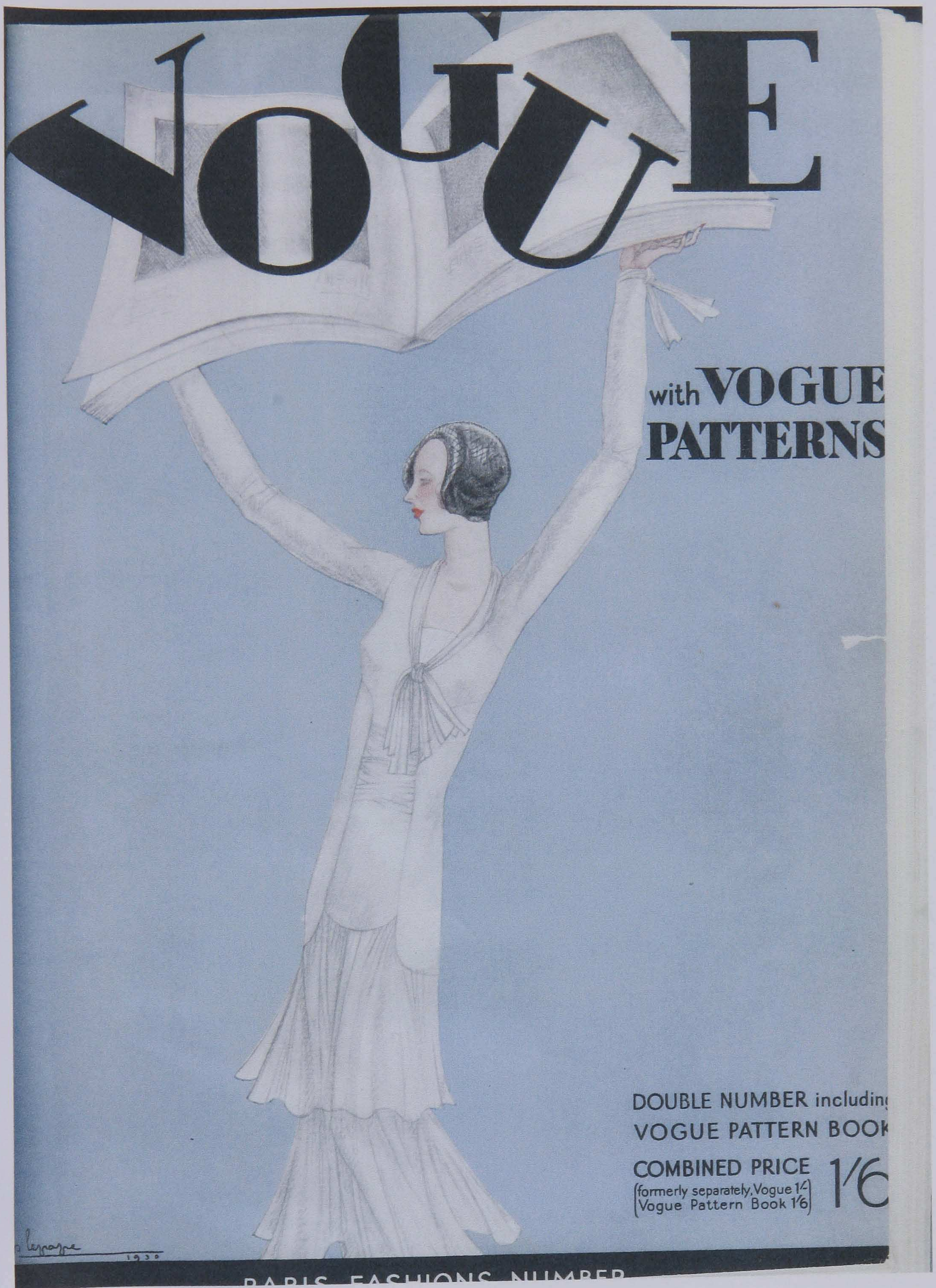


Figure 14.12 Front cover of *Vogue*, 1930.



## WHAT WOMEN READ IN THE HOME COUNTIES

A new Daily Mirror Book of useful facts and figures is now ready, and will be sent on request to the Advertisement Manager, Daily Mirror, Geraldine House, Fetter Lane, London, E.C. 4



Figure 14.13 Advertisement for Daily Mirror Advertising space, *Commercial Art*, April p.viii.





Figure 14.14 Advertisement for advertising space in the *Daily Telegraph*, *Commercial Art and Industry*, October 1934, 167.





ENSEMBLE NO. 52

## SHE MAKES HER OWN

Perhaps you are not yet a Vogue Pattern user. You've noticed the clear diagrammatic drawings at the end of the portfolio for limited incomes, but you've not visualised how they'll look translated into real live clothes. Well, to convince you of the chic possibilities these patterns hold, and further to encourage the many regular users of Vogue Patterns, we are showing photographs of one of our readers—a social personality quite famous for her clothes—who actually "makes her own" with Vogue's help. These costumes, made within the past few months, have even now some of the best lines and smartest details of the current mode.

She teaches a lesson, too, in how to use a pattern intelligently—not only in actually constructing the costume, but in adapting it so that it is individually becoming. For instance, she adds a frill of exquisite lace to frock S-3820 (opposite) and gives it the tone of a couturier's masterpiece. She makes the tunic-jacket of the ensemble above do double duty by putting it over a black skirt for cocktails (opposite). And she knows that good accessories are invaluable supports to a dress.

64 AUGUST 19, 1936

Figure 14.15 *Vogue*, 19 August 1936, 64.





Figure 14.16 Front Cover *Vogue Pattern Book*, c.1930.



# VOGUE PATTERN BOOK

FEBRUARY-MARCH-1934

COMBINED PRICE  
WITH VOGUE.... 1/6

THE CONDÉ NAST PUBLICATIONS LTD.



Figure 14.17 Front Cover, *Vogue Pattern Book*, February-March 1934.





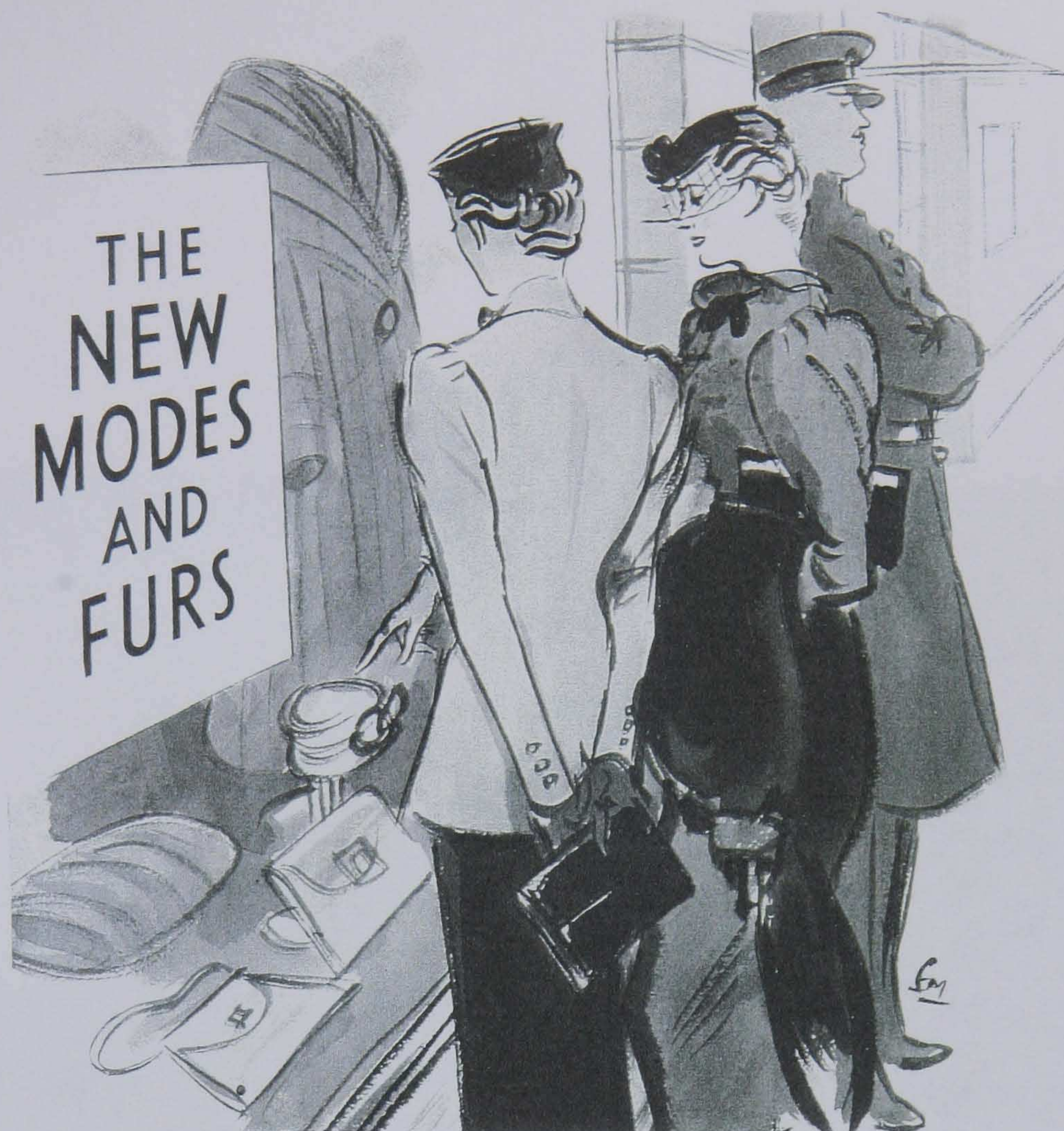
Figure 14.18 *Vogue Pattern Book*, February-March 1934



Buying a new  
fur coat?

Renewing your  
hunting kit?

Wait a bit . . .



Vogue Pattern S3903

Vogue Pattern 443

Wait only a fortnight, though . . . for the next issue of *Vogue*, which headlines these aspects of fashion. But doesn't stop there, of course. For though the Paris collections rush is finished, the fashion editors of *Vogue* have scarcely begun their work! For them, all the hundreds of models to review, all the different trends to simplify—to present the New Mode in the forthcoming issue. To adapt it, too, for Limited Incomes. To tie it up with other aspects of your life—as, for instance, in an article on make-up for the new colours and in the news about shoes, to show how they are influenced by the new lines. So when you go shopping, like the two women above (you can tell they're *Vogue* fans as they're both wearing *Vogue* Pattern outfits) see that you put the next *Vogue* first on your list.

**VOGUE • WEDNESDAY SEPTEMBER 30 • PRICE 1/-**

Figure 14.19 *Vogue*, 16 September 1936, inside back cover.





Figure 15.1 Bomb damaged Oxford Street, September 1940, City of Westminster Archive, T138(34)





Figure 15.2 Salvaging goods at Bourne and Hollingsworth, Oxford Street, September 1940, City of Westminster Archive, T138(32)